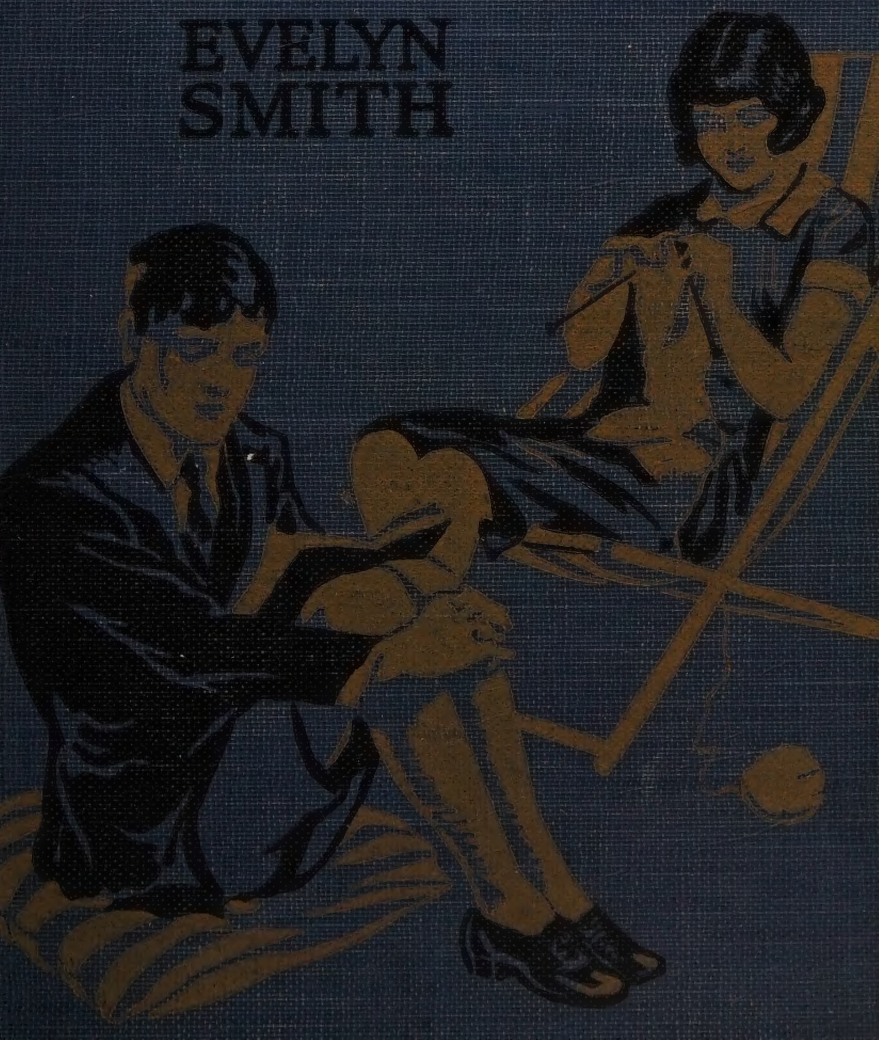
MARIE MACLEOD SCHOOLGIRL

EVELYN SMITH



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MARIE MACLEOD, SCHOOLGIRL

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UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

"Miss Hornsby sharply pulled aside one curtain. 'Marie Macleod!' she exclaimed." (*See page* 82.)

Marie Macleod,
Schoolgirl

By

Evelyn Smith

Author of "The Twins at School"

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Marie Macleod, Schoolgirl

CHAPTER I

AUNT MATILDA'S DECISION

THE SECRET TOWERS,
BRIAR-ROSE AVENUE,
GLASGOW,
September 9.

MY DEREST JACINTHA,—The world is using me cruely, butt I am baring up and resolute nott to complane. My Ant Matilda does nott know the sorrow of my sole. I was under the table not dreeming of evil when I herde her say to the minister hoo is my ennemi that I was to be pakked away to an English school. I was playing at Muncheon with Judith and Brownie and thinking no rong of anywun. I leffed the bigg biskit I had saved and crepped away to tell you what is on my sole. Your faithfull frend,

MARIE STEWART MACLEOD.

P.S.—x x x x.

Marie Macleod sat up straight, looking hard at her completed letter, and carefully wiped both face and fingers with a piece of blotting-paper which had seen much active service. Then, breathing hard, she took an envelope, which she addressed :

THE LADY JACINTHA MACBAIN,
Balmoral Castle,
The Highlands.

There was nothing left to do. To-morrow the letter would be posted, stampless, in the letter-box of the empty house at the corner of Belmont Street, near Wilton Mansions, where Aunt Matilda had a flat. The Lady Jacintha MacBain would not answer, and so the Glasgow postal authorities would not be exercised to discover in which district Briarrose Avenue lay.

Marie did not object to this non-communicative disposition. She knew that Jacintha was as beautiful as a fairy tale and loved hearing her friend's woes. A shadow she may have been, but she was more useful than real people—the real people of Marie's world since her father went to France, two years ago.

So Aunt Matilda meant her to go to school in England! Miss Macphail's little establish-

ment for the education of ladies and gentlemen from eight to ten years had provided boredom and terror enough to satisfy even an aunt, Marie would have thought. England! It must be because her mother, the mother she could not remember, had been English.

She wished she had not abandoned the biscuit which Jenny, the maid-of-all-work, had given her. She would have liked to have continued Muncheon, a good game, about a shipwreck and a cave, but it could not be played without the accompaniment of the sound of chewing a hard substance. She had left the flaxen-haired Judith, too, and Brownie, with his comforting wide smile, and the two rabbits worked on his stuffed chest. Perhaps, if she stole in very softly, she might rescue them.

She tiptoed across the hall, and shrank back as the door of the dining-room burst open—Aunt Matilda always flung back doors as if daring visitors to remain—and the Reverend Mr. Craigielaw, who reminded people of a walrus, shambled out. He laid a broad, warm hand on her head.

"See and be a good lassie when you're away to the school in England, Marie," he said, kindly enough.

Marie raised her elf face, with its pointed chin and round, grey eyes, and the chin began to work and the eyes filled with tears.

"I can't be good!" she cried, surprising herself. "I can't be good when I'm frightened."

And she fled to the comforting shelter of the table in the dining-room, where, hugging Judith to her, she cried so quietly that Aunt Matilda, returning heavily to the room after the minister had been shown out, was not sufficiently disturbed to ask her what was the matter.

CHAPTER II

MARIE TRIES TO ESCAPE

"SYLVIA LEIGH supervises the Green Dorm. I shall be in it this term."

"So shall I. Some luck, isn't it?"

"Rather. But she's strict."

"She's the darlingest darling in the world."

"She's hard on new people."

Marie stared out of the window of the compartment of the local Ledbrooke train, into which the guard, who had been cautiously bribed by Aunt Matilda, had put her when she changed at Stafford. She hoped these girls, these chattering English girls, with their constant laughter and their aggressively crested hatbands, did not realize that she was a new girl, bound for Ledbrooke Spa High School. How should they? Her trunk had been sent on in advance; she had no labelled suit-case with her.

Her appearance, she thought, did not give her away. They had looked curiously at her for a few minutes, observing her short skirt,

made of the Macleod tartan, her dark-green coat with its broad-buckled belt, her long socks, her brogue shoes, but she had met their interested gaze with such unmistakable dislike that they had been embarrassed. Although she was often frightened, Marie's clear eyes seldom flinched from returning the challenge of a stare.

But when the others had given in and become engrossed in their private conversation, she turned to contemplation of the landscape—flat and ugly it seemed to her, with muddy rivers and little toy trees—feeling as if a piece of the Edinburgh rock Aunt Matilda had given her had stuck in her throat and could not be swallowed—which she knew was absurd, for she had eaten every bit, and forgotten the taste of even the brown stick, before the train came to Carlisle.

The girl opposite watched her out of the corners of her eyes. This girl did not seem to know any of the others, and she did not wear the bright blue ribbon which encircled their hats, but there was a quality in her furtive interest which showed that she was in some way connected with them.

At first Marie thought she also must be new, but finally decided that she did not look unhappy enough. Indeed, there was an assur-

ance in the poise of her head, with its neatly arranged fair curls, and the expression of her narrow, light eyes was one of criticism. Marie wriggled, and wished she would look out of the window.

The voices at the other end of the carriage became lower.

"I say. I've heard that a new one is to be put in the Green Dorm."

"Lyn! It's impossible!"

"No. Miss Ashe says so. She told Marjorie last term."

"It's the limit."

"Cheerio! We can rag her."

"What about Sylvia?"

"Sylvia won't interfere. She's bound to suffer from swelled head—they always do. Sylvia says that's the first complaint people have to rid themselves of."

"Perhaps she'll be decent."

"Not if she's put in the Green Dorm. She'll be all right if she's in her proper place."

Marie's heart beat so violently that it almost choked her. The supercilious individual with the fair curls turned a little pink, and at last decided to look out of the window; but the cessation of her scrutiny was of no comfort now.

"The new one"—"the Green Dorm"—"we can rag her." What did it all mean?

To Marie, naturally enough, there was only one "new one," who came from Scotland—Scotland, now so far, far away—and who was named Marie Macleod. Her eyes, round and dark with fear, again turned to the other end of the compartment, but the girls, the bushy-haired one, and the brown one with the lively voice, and the conversational informative one they called "Lyn," were discussing hockey, and said nothing to relieve nor increase her terror. What would really happen?

Sensitive, imaginative little being as she was, Marie had always been shy, and the fault had increased since her father had left home, and Aunt Matilda, with the best of good intentions, had resolved to cure her of it. A small amount of coaxing, of humouring, would have effected the desired reform, for the child was easily interested in her fellow-creatures, and curiosity would soon have overcome fear.

But Aunt Matilda, though she was a kindly soul, would have regarded such a course of behaviour as culpable weakness, and Marie, entrusted to the care of a cousin, was sent off to Miss Macphail's school. Every morn-

ing, at 8.55 precisely, the steps of this establishment were the scene of a violent altercation between Marie, firmly attached to the railings, and the cousin, equally firmly attached to whatever portion of Marie's small person was most convenient.

One day, exasperated by the inevitable defeat she suffered, Marie bit the cousin. Letters were exchanged between Miss Macphail, Mrs. Andrew Macleod, and Miss Matilda Macleod, with the result that Marie went to school under the escort of her aunt. The de'il now departed from the victim, but she became silent and morose, refusing to look at the other children, and often paying no attention to lessons she could, when the whim took her, do with extraordinary ease.

"She's quick in the uptak', but she's awfu' dour," was Miss Petunia Macphail's verdict when, at the end of a term, Miss Macleod asked her opinion of her niece and ward.

Then, in a long and exceptionally severe winter, Marie caught a cold, which developed into pneumonia, and there was no question of school for some months. She had been almost happy—she had read a great many stories, her father had had leave, and had brought

Judith for her from London, and Aunt Matilda had knitted Brownie a striped sports coat. Then—this blow.

But Marie would not be crushed too easily. After all, why should she be put in the Green Dorm, whatever it might be? Why should she not arrive at school a little late—when everything had been settled—why, indeed, should she arrive at all? Aunt Matilda was not on the train. She might escape and "find work." Not only had she read some juvenile fiction, but on several occasions she had been allowed to go to a Sauchiehall Street cinema with Jenny. So she knew all about the interesting future that awaits runaways.

"I'm wee," she thought, "and ten isn't very old, but I'm quick in the uptak'. Miss Petunia said so. Perhaps I could mind a baby. I'd like fine to mind a baby."

How did people go about getting work? They put advertisements in the *Glasgow Herald*, of course. Jenny used to read them in the evenings, when Marie, stolen into the kitchen to play with Judith and Brownie, would hear that "no yin could thole Miss Macleod ony longer than ae year, and there were ithers who would like fine to secure her, Jenny's, services." Marie shut her eyes, and thought.

"Girl, aged ten, fairly strong, respectable, seeks situation. Baby preferred.—Apply X.Y.Z., *Herald* Office."

It was a funny address, but then, so was Jacintha's. What happened to all Jacintha's letters? What would happen to a letter addressed to "Miss Marie Macleod, The Secret Towers, Briar-rose Avenue, Glasgow"?

"It's all pretend," she reflected wearily. "Perhaps this is, too. I'll wake in a minute and know it's pretend, and I'll write to Jacintha and tell her about my strange, strange dream."

The train slowed down and bumped to a standstill. The girls reached to the racks for cases and hockey-sticks—laughing, chattering, excited. The girl opposite Marie gave a little cough, and got up with the others, tossing back her curls.

"Ledbrooke," called a genial voice in an unfamiliar accent. "Ledbrooke Spa. Orl chainge."

Hot and cold alternately with excitement, Marie precipitated herself on to the platform after the others. Two or three tall girls, wearing bright blue ties to match their hat-ribbons, glanced in an authoritative manner from carriage to carriage, and one of them said to the fair-haired child:

"Are you Marie Macleod or Maude Semple?"

Marie realized that she must act immediately. Turning her back on the group, she walked steadily to the exit gate, gave up her ticket, and, once outside the station, began to run.

The streets, wide and white, shaded with linden trees, were not crowded like those to which she had been accustomed in Glasgow, and she had put a considerable distance between herself and the station before she slackened her pace from a run to a brisk walk. She found that she had come to the end of the pavement, houses and shops, to a sign-post which pointed to banked and flowery lanes, stretching away into the blue distance, perhaps as far as Scotland.

She chose the one with purple vetch trailing from its hedges, and trudged soberly on, thinking of Sylvia Leigh and the Green Dorm. Anyway, she had escaped unknown evils, and, although she was hot and tired, dusty and hungry, no one would be "strict" with her or "rag" her. What would become of her? She might fail to find work, in which case she would die of starvation. It would be dreadfully sad if she did die. Aunt Matilda would realize then that she really had had things

to be afraid of, that she wasn't just naughty and obstinate, "dour," when she was shy.

Marie stopped short, frightened.

Over a low wall, on which the ivy was trimmed and clipped, she saw ominous shapes of white and grey, some looming with arms outstretched, some folded within themselves. . . . The burial-ground—the place where the dead people were. . . .

Marie no longer contemplated the possibility of death. She went softly along, one eye fixed on that solemn company of marble and granite, as if some power might suddenly leap out upon her and enchant her into a little cold stone, standing up straight, firmly planted in the grassy ground.

Voices and bicycle bells sounded in the distance. Suddenly remembering that she was a fugitive, Marie glanced wildly round. Bright blue hatbands! She dashed on, flung herself through a little gate, and crouched behind a grandfatherly old greyish-brown stone, recording the virtues of one Josiah Blenkinsop, who departed this life in 1799, aged eighty years.

"She can't have gone much farther," said a voice, as two bicycles flashed past.

"Let's try another half-mile. She had a good start."

"*What* a child!"

The voices faded. Marie, heart pit-a-pat, crept round from old Mr. Blenkinsop's friendly shelter. She was no longer afraid of the tombs. They were silent and protecting, and the air was sweet with the fragrance of the roses which grew on grassy mounds or between kerbs of marble. They were all named—they were a kind of pretend people, with the good qualities of this species.

Forgetting her loneliness and her fears, she stole from grave to grave, each stone assuming a vivid personality as she read the inscription on it. What fine characters all these people had been! None of them seemed to have done anything wrong. Would they have thought her very naughty? She glanced about her with round, appealing eyes. They all looked very solemn—even kindly Mr. Blenkinsop, with the ivy trail creeping down his back. "A venerable parent, a virtuous husband, a pillar to both Church and State." What would he say to a girl who ran away from school?

She could have declared he shook his head at her. Then, almost at her feet, she saw a tiny mound, overgrown with grass, which was so long that it nearly hid the little head-stone,

on which was no name, only the date—March, 1915.

"Och, the wee thing," she said softly to herself. And she sat down in the grass beside it.

A jar which had held flowers lay on its side, empty. Except for the gleaming white stone which marked its place, this was a neglected little grave.

"It's a wee baby's," thought Marie.

She filled the jar with water, and gathered a bunch of daisies for it. Then she sat down again, and closed her eyes. How hot September was in England! Her feet ached inside the new brogues, and she was very, very hungry. . . . They would have given her something to eat at school, even if she had been in the Green Dorm. And she could have taken off her shoes and unpacked Judith and Brownie, whom she had slipped inside her trunk when Aunt Matilda wasn't looking. If only she had Judith with her now, to clasp in her arms and kiss, and Brownie, so that she could hold his big flat ear. . . . Perhaps Sylvia Leigh would find him and be cruel to him—people in the street often laughed at him. . . . It didn't matter much, anyway. . . .

"Coom, wyke oop, dookie! They've

coom ter tyke yer ter yer noice new school."

Marie opened her eyes with a start, and raised her bewildered head. It was nearly dark—and how stiff she felt! Half dazed, she stared at the round, rosy face of a stout woman before her, to whose skirts clung a little boy of about two years. On the path stood the two tall girls wearing blue ties and hatbands, the girls who had scanned the train, and who had passed on bicycles. One of them looked cross, the other bored.

"Oi thort Oi saw 'er there," said the stout woman. "It's a blessin' Oi noticed 'er, isn't it, nah?"

"Please," said Marie, in a shaky voice, "please do you need a strong girl, aged ten, to look after yon wee boy?"

The woman laughed. "Bless yer, dookie," she said. "'Erb cen look arter 'imself, cen't yer, yer reskil?" Then, turning aside to the two girls: "She's dreamin'."

"Och, won't I do?" begged Marie, fighting with tears. "I can't go to school. I will work hard for you. They'll be cruel to me at school. I'm feared for them." And she stopped, unable to say more.

The girl who looked across made an effort to be reassuring.

"Look here, who's been stuffing you up with that nonsense?" she demanded. "School's a topping place—you'll like it."

"It's you who are cruel to us," said the other girl, arranging her blue tie, and looking reprovingly at Marie. "We've been looking for you for ages, and we're nearly dead of hunger."

"The head girl herself has buzzed off on the quest," resumed the first speaker. "D'you call that cruel? Giving up tea, reunion with bosom friends—all the complete interesting show, for one Scotch snippet like you?"

Marie hated being called a Scotch snippet, but she was too near tears to express her feelings by the usual round-eyed and abashing regard. She tightened her lips, and was silent.

"Well, Mrs. Pugh, we'll be off," said the bored girl with a sigh. "Chris, haven't you a back step on your bike? Thank you very much, Mrs. Pugh."

"Down't menshun it, Miss Marjorie. Nah, then, dookie, off yer gow. Good look ter yer—be a brive little gell, and yer'll be 'appy."

Circumstances were too much for Marie. For one desperate moment she thought of

flinging her arms round old Mr. Blenkinsop, and refusing to be detached from him, but Chris looked dreadfully strong, and common sense told her that resistance would be useless. Meekly, with hanging head, she followed the two big girls from the cemetery, while Mrs. Pugh brought up the rear with 'Erb, who, as if disappointed about something, broke into loud wails. His expression of grief was comforting to Marie, and the tears had drained from her eyes by the time they all reached the gate.

"Now, Marjorie, for busting the record," said Chris. "Infant missed the way up to school—what?"

"Best scheme. Sylvia thought so."

"Right-o. Now then, snippet, hop up."

"I'm frightened," said Marie. "I'll fall off."

"Well, if you do, you do, and back you go to the cemetery. But it'll be much more comfy if you don't. Half a sec., Marjorie. Give it a shove up when I'm on."

It was not only for athletic prowess that Chris Cunningham was captain of the hockey team. Marie found herself submitting to being lifted on to an uncomfortably tilted back step, and, trembling with fear, obediently and tightly clasped her arms round Chris's

waist, while Marjorie delivered a little bored advice on the advisability of keeping still.

"And don't give an impersonation of drowning man plus straw," added Chris. "Remember, I want a little wind to enable me to convey a hefty snippet like you to our noble seat of learning."

The bicycle shook and creaked, and Chris's hair tickled Marie's nose and chin almost unbearably, but she dared not move, and resigned herself to the prospect of a terrible accident. However, her fears proved groundless, and she was surprised to find herself safely deposited on the steps of a long grey building, alive with the hum of voices and the brisk patter of feet.

"Take my bike round with yours, and I'll see if Sylvia's in," said Chris, and Marie followed her up a flight of shallow polished stairs and along a corridor, at the end of which a door, flung open, disclosed a long room in which several lively individuals of twelve or thirteen years of age were busily scuttling about to perform various tasks, directed by a tall girl, with a graceful little head, and a voice Marie at once liked, though it was giving criticisms and instructions.

"Quite decent, Diana. I could sleep in it myself. No, Kitty, you mayn't have more

than two photographs on your shelf. Put your brother in your box for the present. . . . Becky! Becky! Look at that odious heap of toffee wrappers under your bed! All right, Lyn, if you've finished, show Maude where to put her hockey stick and racket. Thanks, Kitty, I don't want a chocolate mouse. Have three, and take the rest down to Matron till week-end. Mind, now. You can't be sick in the Green Dorm."

Marie, though she should have been shock-proof by this time, again experienced a queer sensation at her heart. Walls, curtains, bed-covers—all green! There could be no mistake. This was the Green Dorm. Those busy figures were her companions of the train, and that lordly young woman by the window, whose every command they flew to obey, that was Sylvia Leigh.

"Thought you'd be here, Sylvie. This is the sixth kid for the Green Dorm."

Sylvia's clear eyes regarded Marie at first sternly, then pitifully. Her voice was quite gentle when she spoke.

"You're a silly wee thing," she said, "but I expect you're hungry. Take her down to Matron, Diana. She can unpack afterwards."

The curly-haired Diana turned to give

Marie one piece of information as she led the way downstairs.

"That's our head girl," she said. "She's half Scotch, you know."

Marie didn't know, but, through all the confusion of new impressions, she realized that, whatever the future might have in store for her, she had no reason to be afraid of Sylvia Leigh.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST TUSSLE

THE DONEJOHN KEPE,
SCHOOL,
ENGLAND.

MY DEAREST JACINTHA,—I slepped last nite in the Green Dorm, and no one was cruel to me, butt this morning the girls geered at me while I dressed. They did nott speke, butt I saw they geered. I am in Form Lower 111, and am to lerne lattin and jommetry. We had a jommetry lesson to-day, butt I only had to draw a squair and a wrecked angle, which was simple. I must find a post-bocks for my letters to you—I know not where. The other girls in the Dorm are playing hokki, butt the Dr. says I must nott yet, on akownt of my New Moanya, about which I informed you. The girls are named Diana Kyrle, Kitty Keyes, Lyn Somerton, and Becky Dermott. I do nott like them. There is a new girl named

Maude Semple. She is not nice.—With love,

Your only frende,
MARIE STEWART MACLEOD.

P.S.—x x x x x

Marie stopped writing, and heaved a big sigh. Jacintha was a good friend, but she would like to see her and play with her. The others had gone gaily off to the hockey-field, talking of their prowess, and of their chances of being tried as second-eleven substitutes, and Maude Semple, as a matter of course, had accompanied them. Everyone seemed to have forgotten the existence of the other new girl, and she had crept into the big schoolroom where the boarders did their lessons, to compose a letter to Jacintha—she would write to her father and to Aunt Matilda later, when she could borrow a dictionary.

With the exception of a station waiting-room, there is no place more depressing than a deserted schoolroom, and, as Marie glanced round at the ink-splashed desks and tables and the sombrely tinted walls, she felt a dismal temptation to tears.

"Be a brive little gell, and yer'll be 'appy," Mrs. Pugh had said. Perhaps she

was a coward. But she was so dreadfully lonely!

No, she wasn't! Judith and Brownie were upstairs! She had sneaked them out of her trunk last night and ensconced them under a pile of underclothing in the deeper of the two long drawers in the little chest that stood by her bed. Sylvia had glanced at her arrangement of her possessions, and had said it was all right.

Joyfully she slipped Jacintha's letter into her pocket, resolving to post it at the first opportunity, and ran upstairs to the Green Dorm. Softly she turned the handle, for she still had the stranger's sensation of having no right to be anywhere, and she half expected Sylvia Leigh, or Matron, or one of the aloof young mistresses in residence at the school boarding-house to leap from a corner and scold her for being indoors. But the dormitory was empty, and, tiptoeing across the polished floor, she knelt down on the rug by her little green bed, and opened the drawer where her treasures lay.

There they were—Judith, whose light hair had faded to a greyish tint, and whose complexion had been worn away by constant kisses, and Brownie, with his painted eyes staring sideways from his funny face, and

his big ears standing stiffly out from his head.

Marie gathered them to her bosom, and pressed their unresponsive lips to hers. She arranged Judith's blue frock, and fingered the two rabbits worked on Brownie's chest. She did not want to play—it was joy enough to have her darlings to love.

"Ma wee doo," she crooned, rocking Judith in her arms and kissing her head. "Ma little wee croodlin doo."

The door opened, and someone came in cautiously, as Marie had done. Marie glanced round, still clasping Judith, while Brownie rolled noiselessly to the floor. She did not know whether she was relieved or sorry to see the fair curls and critical eyes of Maude Semple.

"I say!" exclaimed the new-comer in a high, silvery voice. "Do you play with dolls?"

Marie nodded. Her expression was dangerous, but Maude came over to her side, and spoke in a friendly tone.

"I gave them up some time ago," she said, "but I'm older than you, I dare say. I'm nearly thirteen. How old are you?"

"Ten," said Marie.

"I say, it's good to be in the Lower Third

when you're only ten! You must be the youngest, by a long way. Are you awfully clever?"

Marie nodded.

"Och, I'm quick in the uptak'," she said, remembering Miss Petunia's words.

Maude looked puzzled.

"What's her name?" she asked, pointing to Judith. "That's rather a sweet frock she has on."

"Judith," said Marie, pleased. "She has two more frocks, a pink and a tartan, but it's the Fraser tartan, not the Stewart or the Macleod, and so I'm not very taken up with it. Jenny, that's Aunt Matilda's wee maid, is making her a new one. Macleod, like mine."

Maude stared at Marie's short kilted skirt, and, expressively, at the bare knees above the knitted socks. Then she regarded Brownie.

"Father brought him from London a long time ago, in a present," informed Marie, anxious to propitiate the Sassenach with the idea of the importance of her native capital.

"My baby brother has one like it, only smaller," said Maude.

Marie looked at her doubtfully. Then, hearing a clatter of feet on the stairs, she rammed Judith and Brownie into the drawer, and covered them with a nightgown.

"Dinna clype tae t'ithers," she whispered, lapsing into pure Jenny, as she had a way of doing when excited—one of Aunt Matilda's reasons for the English boarding-school. "I'm no carin' for them to know."

"Do you mean that you don't want me to tell them?" asked Maude, as she pirouetted over to her strip of glass and arranged the bow on her curls. "You needn't be afraid."

The door burst open, and in tumbled Diana, scarlet and laughing. Becky was at her heels; Kitty and Lyn followed, locked in combat. They fell on Kitty's bed and tussled like a pair of puppies, oblivious to everything but the joy of physical contest.

"Shut up, you two," advised Becky. "Sylvia will be in in a sec. to see if we've left the Dorm tidy. She's just gone to her room to change."

"Hallo!" said Diana, approaching Marie. "Don't you play hockey?"

Marie shook her head.

"Is it afraid of getting its little knees knocked?" inquired Becky, with derisive sympathy. "Hasn't it any stockings in its wee trunkie?"

Marie looked at her bare knees and at the long black-stockinged legs of her room-mates. Sudden horror seized her.

"Don't tease it, Beck," said Diana. "It's horribly lonely. We'll introduce it to some nice little friends in Form One to-morrow."

"Where's the rattle, dearie?" asked Becky.

Relieved, Marie unlocked her lips. She could answer that question, anyway, she told herself.

"I haven't got a rattle," she said, and looked round, startled at the sudden shriek of joy that went up from the others.

"Sure?" cried Kitty, tumbling off the bed and dragging Lyn across to Marie.

"Of course," said Marie stiffly.

"She has no *rattle*," said Maude sweetly, as she joined the group. "But she has brought her *toys*."

"Have you, darling?" asked Lyn, after a swift appraising glance at the other new girl. "Will you let us play with them?"

"Where are they?" exclaimed Diana.

Maude nodded towards the bottom drawer, and Marie, flinging herself on the floor, pushed her small hands against the lock, with a violent gesture of defiance and despair.

"Oh, show them to us," begged Kitty. "I'd love to be reminded of my joyful childhood."

"Don't be selfish," said Diana gravely. "Here we all are at school—overworked disgracefully—nothing to play but horrid rough games like hockey. Surely you'll let us have one look?"

"Otherwise we shall have to *insist*," said Becky.

There was a moment's silence, during which Marie, pressed against the drawer, glared at the others like a furious little vixen defending her cubs. Then Diana and Kitty sprang forward, forced her away, and laid her, quite gently, on her bed, while Becky, with a howl of delight, seized Brownie's left ear, which protruded from beneath the covering nightgown, and waved him aloft.

"Hurrah!"

"Isn't he nice and soft?"

"No hard places to hurt the little hands."

"Face painted, though. That's dangerous. They always put things in their mouths, you know."

"P'r'aps we should wash the paint off."

"Here's dolly!" And Diana brandished Judith above her head.

"Oh, pitty."

"Do they sleep with you?"

"Give her to me a minute." And Maude, laughing and delighted, snatched Judith from Diana, and dropped her with a crash, as Marie, without word or cry, sprang on her, and, seizing her fair curls, tugged them without mercy. With a scream of real pain, Maude tried to push away her assailant, but her foot caught in the rug, and she fell to the floor, Marie on top of her. Her knee on the chest of the prostrate traitress, Marie, her little strength increased tenfold by her passionate anger, dealt blow after blow, while Diana tried to pull her away, Becky tried to remove Maude, and Kitty remarked, in a tone of awed enjoyment, "Look! Someone's nose is bleeding."

"What—on—earth—are you doing?"

Sylvia Leigh seized Marie by the arm. Her grey eyes blazed; she was almost as white as the infuriated child.

"Do you know this dormitory has had the best reputation in the house?" she asked, her voice low, and shaking with anger. "And do you also know that it's going to keep it? What do you mean, all of you? Get up, and don't lie there howling," to the injured Maude. "Get up and wash your face, and let's see what's the matter with you."

Maude obeyed with some difficulty, and

Kitty, accompanying her to the basin which faced her bed, offered a sponge, and turned on the hot-water tap and her own stock of interesting information.

"They call it claret in the ring," she observed. "So my brother says. He's a great fighter. Marie Macleod has tapped Maude Semple's claret."

Sylvia, spinning sharply round on her heel, bestowed on Kitty a glance that produced absolute silence and an almost morbid interest in sponging Maude's face. Then she addressed Diana.

"You're top of the Lower Third," she said. "I should have thought *you*, at least, would have had enough in you to stop two new girls making asses of themselves and doing their best to ruin the Green Dorm."

Diana swallowed hard, for she loved Sylvia. Then, with a characteristic toss of her bright head, she returned the angry accusing look of the grey eyes with steady, though ashamed, blue ones.

"I was in it," she said. "I ragged Marie Macleod, and made her furious."

"So did I," said Lyn.

"And I," said Becky.

"And I," muttered Kitty from the basin.

Maude gulped and moaned, pressing her hand to her head.

"Och, Judith!" cried Marie, suddenly perceiving a shattered head, from which hung two ghastly glass eyes, one at either end of what looked like a small sausage of wax. "Och, see her eyes! Judith is dead! Judith is dead!"

And, flinging herself on the floor, she broke into a storm of passionate tears.

Sylvia turned to Becky.

"Pick that up!" she said, pointing to the fragments. "Put it in the waste-paper basket. Put the doll's body on Marie's bed. Next week you had better devote your Saturday money to buying her a new head. You'll be absolute rotters if you don't."

"It was her fault," moaned Maude. "I shouldn't have dropped her doll if she hadn't attacked me like a—raging lion."

Sylvia contemplated the small figure that lay sobbing at her feet, and her lower lip trembled. But it was quite firm again when she regarded Maude with the famous look that had silenced Kitty, the look that all the juniors and a few of the seniors dreaded. It was quite firm when she bent and touched Marie on the shoulder. No one would have guessed that she had nearly laughed.

"Get up and wash your face," she said. "Why didn't you come to hockey?"

"I'm not allowed to. I have a stiffy-cate."

"Then you must go for a walk with Miss Hornsby and the invalids. But I should have said you were sufficiently capable of violent physical exertion for hockey," remarked Sylvia dryly.

Marie raised her eyes to the head girl's face, for she remembered the tender little pitiful look of last night, and wanted to see it again. But it was not there. Sylvia must be really angry.

It was worse than Judith's being dead.

CHAPTER IV

A SHOPPING EXPEDITION

THE DONEJOHN KEPE,
ENGLAND.
School.
Le vingt-neuf septembre.

DEAREST JACINTHA,—This is soon to be riting agane, and I will be posting two letters to you at wunce, but I am wearying for you. Mademoiselle says my frensh accent is charming. I like frensh. We go across from the school to the bording-house for lessons, and many Day Girls comm. They are nott very nice, because of my sox. I sent Ant Matilda a post card immploring her to forward a Post Lorder for stokkings, but I do nott think she will pitty me. If my feres prove true, I must taik the money Sylvia said the girls must give me, for they torment me, and a climbaxe must comm.—Ever your sorrowfull

MARIE STEWART MACLEOD.

P.S.—I send you sicks kisses.

A Shopping Expedition

"Have you all written your letters? Ready for your walk?" and Sylvia Leigh, books under one arm, sauntered across to the long table where the occupants of the Green Dorm sat doing lessons or inscribing inky epistles to their friends and relatives.

It was Saturday morning, when the mistress generally responsible for the duty of walks was off charge, and the younger boarders went in turn into the little town to shop or post letters under the supervision of prefects, each of whom was responsible for three juniors.

Miss Dangerfield, the head mistress, objected to more than four of her pupils walking together, unless in a crocodile, and the prefects objected to crocodiles, so Sylvia, Chris, and Marjorie, the prefects in residence, took their own little contingents, and the excitement of "going into town" without a mistress was eagerly coveted by the Green, Red and Blue dormitories, where the junior boarders slept.

"Only three of you can come," said Sylvia, looking round the table. "The others will have their turn next week, you know."

The six stared at her in suspense while she considered them.

"Diana, as she's top of the form. . . .

Kitty, don't you want to post a parcel to your brother?"

Diana and Kitty clasped hands, and exchanged glances of congratulation.

"And Marie Macleod, as she wants to buy a new doll's head," finished Sylvia. "Has Matron given you your weekly money?"

Yes, she had.

"Then shell out. Threepence each—that's one and three. That ought to buy a tolerable head."

With rueful countenances they counted out the money on the table. Marie saw them, and her heart thumped. A head for her doll—that was absurd. No new head would make Judith Judith again, and she did not intend to give it a chance. Judith had gone, and she cried a little for her every night, when, in the darkness, she folded empty arms to her breast.

But she felt more inclined to cry because the girls laughed at her—if only they wouldn't! Diana Kyrle particularly, with her bright bush of chestnut hair and her keen, gay look—if only she wouldn't! She had spoken in quite a friendly way on the stairs that first night, but she had been horrid ever since. Every morning she had invented some fresh insult about the socks

—those babyish socks. If only she could know that Jeanie Macfarlane, of the flat above Aunt Matilda's, had worn socks when she was thirteen! After all, Marie was only ten, though she was in the Lower Third. But you couldn't argue with Diana—or Kitty—or Lyn—or Becky—and you hated Maude Semple too much to want to convince her of anything.

But the socks could not continue. Marie had made up her mind on that point.

"Will there be another post this forenoon?" she asked falteringly of Sylvia, as that inquisitor swept up the pennies.

"Not till to-night," was the reply.

So Aunt Matilda had not answered her post card—and there had been time. If she did send the postal order demanded the Green Dorm should have their money back. . . . But the stockings must be bought to-day.

The scarlet crept up her neck to her brow as she stretched out her hand and took the coins Sylvia offered her. There was an almost inaudible sigh from the others as she did so, and Maude, with a sneer, whispered to Becky.

"She's Scotch!" she said.

"So am I," said Sylvia aloud and sharply. "Hurry up and get ready, you three, and, Kitty, you'd look even more striking if you'd

wash that dreary blot from your chin—yes, to the right—no good, you'll have to risk water. Remember I'm waiting."

"I bag Sylvia on the way down," said Diana, as they put on their hats and struggled into their reefer coats.

"Right-o. But remember she's mine coming home," retorted Kitty.

"That means I must look after the baby," sighed Diana, "and it'll be tired by then, and fractious, won't it, the pet?"

Rightly regarding the question as rhetorical, Marie stowed her letters to Jacintha in her coat pocket, and said nothing. But she did not anticipate pleasure from the companionship of Diana and Kitty, and, if it had not been so necessary for her to procure the stockings, she would have offered the privilege of going into town to Becky or Lyn.

Relief came at the front door.

"You two walk on in front," Sylvia commanded her adorers. "I want to tell Marie about the shops, and the weekly money rule, and the Green Dorm."

While she was too anxious and unhappy really to enjoy being with Sylvia, Marie was glad to be free from torment, and listened to explanation and information in polite

silence, but the head girl felt instinctively that she was not really interested, and as soon as she could changed the subject.

"Would you like to buy your doll's head first?" she asked.

Marie hesitated.

"I was going to ask you," she stammered, flushing, "could I—would it be against the rules if I went alone?"

Sylvia glanced at her sympathetically. She had asked no further questions about the ragging episode, though she knew she could have extracted a reliable account of the whole case from Diana. She always preferred to draw her own conclusions, and they were generally right.

"Mayn't I come with you?" she asked.

Marie shook her head.

"I'd rather be quite alone," she said.

It was Sylvia's turn to hesitate.

"Well, I'll show you the way to the toy-shop," she decided, "and you can go in while we post Kitty's parcel. But you won't lose yourself, will you? Meet us just outside the post-office."

"Surely," promised Marie, and Sylvia felt a pang of pity as she saw the sudden lighting up of the odd, pathetic little face.

"The kid's unhappy," she thought.

" And she doesn't look as if she had ever been particularly otherwise."

She stood and watched Marie cross the crowded road to the window of the toy-shop she had pointed out, and she felt vaguely disturbed. She knew that it would be foolish to plead with the others to " be decent " to Marie. She did not want to jeopardize the new girl's possible future happiness by inviting confidences and complaints. Marie was certainly rather a nuisance—already she had run away from school, and had shed a fellow-pupil's blood. . . . And it was a pity she had taken that money, even though it had been offered.

Marie gave a quick look over her shoulder as the three disappeared in the dirction of the post-office, and, satisfied that there was no immediate danger of discovery and pursuit, glanced eagerly round in search of a draper's shop. She remembered passing a big one when she had run from the station, but she wanted to find one nearer than that, so that she might finish her errand in time to meet Sylvia and the others.

She walked quickly along, inspecting both sides of the street — milliner's, grocer's, jeweller's, baby-linen shops, but not one which looked as if it would sell stockings.

Her heart sank as she saw a blue hatband—Diana Kyrle emerging from the post-office.

In another moment her opportunity would be gone. There was no help for it. Desperately she turned, and hurried down a side street, which apparently led to an important one. "I must get them," she thought, "I must. I can find my way back to the school by myself."

Luck at last! Big windows fronted her, elaborately inscribed with gilt letters, and adorned with all manner of garments. Grasping her little purse, which bulged with the fifteen contributed coppers and her own weekly threepence, she shyly edged in at the first door, where her progress was at once arrested by an inquisitive gentleman wearing a white waistcoat and a white geranium with asparagus fern.

"Yes, Moddom? What can we do for you?"

"Stockings, please," whispered Marie.

"'Osiery? Miss Perkins, forward. Ladies' 'ose."

Marie climbed on to the high chair he pushed forward for her, and looked entreatingly at the languid young lady who drifted past a background of boxes, and, as it seemed, refusing to meet her eyes, tossed a few pairs

of black cashmere clocked stockings on the counter before her.

There was silence, while Marie touched the goods with trembling fingers.

"These ones, please," she said in a low voice, laying aside those which looked the longest, and were in reality designed for some "large lady's" wear.

Miss Perkins, with the minimum amount of physical exertion, conveyed them into a piece of paper and loosely secured them with a string.

"Three and sex," she said to the door.

The world crashed about Marie.

Miss Perkins waited.

A queer little voice, which she supposed must be her own, sounded in Marie's ears.

"Have you any cheaper ones?" it said. "Any—at *one* and six?"

The question seemed to have inflicted some physical injury upon Miss Perkins, but she retained her self-possession.

"Three and sex, three shelling, two sex and a half," she recited in a bored monotone.

Marie slid from her chair. She did not know what to say, so she said nothing. She heard Miss Perkins sigh, and crept out of the shop, praying that the gentleman with the white geranium might not see her.

So it was useless! Stockings evidently could not be bought for one and six. She must go back to school—and Sylvia would be angry—and she would still be in socks—and the girls would tease her.

Something rolled down her cheek, and fell, scalding, on her hand. Oh, no, she simply mustn't cry—ten years old, and in the street! She swallowed hard, licked up the companion tear, which was well on its way, and rummaged in her pocket for her handkerchief.

Jacintha's letters! Well, she would post those. And she would spend her own threepence while she was out. Sylvia and the others would have gone back now, anyway.

Soberly she went along the street, thinking of the time she had traversed it before, running from the station. It seemed a year since then. Mrs. Pugh had been kind, and 'Erb had cried, as if he wanted her for a nurse. And there was old Mr. Blenkinsop, and the baby.

The daisies might be dead. She would go and see. She would take some violets—they were selling them in the streets, and threepence would buy plenty of violets for a baby's grave.

The baby had become a real person to Marie by now. She—it was a girl baby—was

prettier than 'Erb, with eyes that were blue all over, with none of the gold flecks Marie was ashamed of in her own, and a dent in the back of her neck, where her hair lay in one soft curl, ever so wee——

Marie smiled to herself, and her steps became lighter as she went quickly along, thinking of the baby and Jacintha, and oblivious to her surroundings.

"Oh, I *am* sorry. Have I hurt you?"

Marie replaced her hat, which had slipped on to the back of her head as the result of a collision with a being of bigger proportions than her own, and blinked up at the speaker, whose voice, though curiously detached and sad, as if she were talking in a dream, was very sweet. How sorrowful she seemed, with her floating black veil, and her pale cheeks!

Marie forgot to be polite, and said nothing, and the lady, after one quick glance at her, passed on. Marie turned round and stared after her, and she looked back once, but did not return.

"Did she come out of that house?" thought Marie. "What a sad house, with all its eyes tight shut!"

She paused and looked along the paved walk, bordered thickly with straggling September flowers. Late roses and clematis hung

above the porch. The steps had not been whitened for many days, and the brass knocker and bell were tarnished. All the blinds were drawn down, and the shutters of the lower windows were closed. By the green gate a wooden letter-box was fixed, and a long, silvery track showed where a snail had crawled across it.

"My letters for Jacintha!" thought Marie. This was the place for them—a far more suitable one than the slot of the front door of the great house at the corner of Belmont Street, where the metal flap would spring back with a click which made Jacintha's friend scurry down the steps in fear, though she knew that no footsteps would cross the hall, no hand take down the bar and chain. Perhaps Jacintha did not live at Balmoral Castle after all, but had some connexion with this lonely flowery place, and with the tall lady with the floating veil and the unhappy eyes.

Marie disposed of her two letters and went dreamily on her way, so engrossed in a new setting for her friend that she forgot school, and socks, and her promise to Sylvia, until suddenly a church clock struck a sharp stroke, and brought her back to reality.

"Dinner is at one, and I will be late," she thought fearfully, and she ran to the iron

gates of the cemetery, hurried to the little grave, replaced the faded daisies with the living violets, and, full of forebodings, set off at a brisk pace for school.

Matron met her at the door as two o'clock sounded.

"There'll be no dinner for you to-day," she said sternly. "Where have you been?"

Marie stammered forth an unsatisfactory explanation, which was cut short by a sharp—

"Go up to your dormitory and wait there. You will be reported on Monday to Miss Dangerfield."

Tired, hot, and dusty, Marie climbed the stairs, made her way to the Green Dorm, and flung herself on her bed. Miss Dangerfield, with her tortoiseshell-rimmed pince-nez and quick, keen glance, rose up before her, but Miss Dangerfield was not as terrible as Diana and Kitty, Becky and Lyn. . . . She would be cross, crosser than Aunt Matilda, probably she might expel her, but that wouldn't matter. . . . Her anger would happen and be over, but the gibes of the Green Dorm girls were unending. Even if one of them were friendly for a moment, she said something hateful immediately afterwards. Those socks. . . .

Suddenly inspiration came to her. She

got up slowly, pushing her hair back from her forehead. She looked towards the long shelf where the girls kept their school hats—empty, but for hers. Then they were playing hockey —she would be alone till nearly four o'clock. She took out her purse, and deposited threepence on the pillow of each bed. Then she opened her bottom drawer.

Poor wee Brownie! Was he as lonely as his mistress? Did *he* miss Judith? She stroked his face and patted his chest, before lifting him to one side that she might rummage for her socks.

Five neatly folded pairs—and those she had on. That would mean three pairs of stockings, if her plan succeeded. It was a good thing the socks were long ones, turned over an elastic garter just below the knee, though it was a pity they weren't the same colours . . . the Lovat mixture, the yellow and black to go with the best Macleod tartan, the ordinary brown, the bronze silk for her best dress. Those that she was wearing matched the Lovat fairly well.

She pulled off one, cut it in halves, and, having laboriously threaded a needle and made a large knot in the cotton, began to sew the hose-top she had created to the unworn, lighter

coloured sock, while triumph swelled in her heart. At last she had found a way! And it hadn't been necessary to take the Saturday threepences—the others would appreciate that, and be nicer to her, perhaps.

The elastic garter was rather tight in its new position, and the join of the manufactured stocking more obvious than Marie could have wished, but she buckled her brogue with a feeling of satisfaction, and, drawing off the other sock, set to work to lengthen it in the same way. The yellow and black ones must be left—the bronze silk might be joined to the heather mixture. If only her skirts were a little longer, so that her knees wouldn't show! Perhaps she could fasten them lower down, or unpick the hems.

"Well, Marie, why didn't you meet us, as you said you would?"

Marie started, clasping her unfinished work. Sylvia stood looking down at her. She was wearing her gym tunic and carrying her hockey stick, her hair was damp and darkened round her temples, and she was flushed as if from a hard game.

"Are the others coming?" gasped Marie.

Sylvia's eyes, demanding an explanation, suddenly rested upon Marie's right leg, with its parti-coloured stocking, and her bare left

one, and her toes, just touching the ground. For a minute they remained intent. Then she walked across the room and pulled the curtain that shut Marie and her furniture and her possessions into a small oblong green world of her own.

"Do you want to wear stockings?" she asked abruptly.

"Yes," said Marie.

"I think it's a pity. I like your socks."

"They're babyish."

"The others think so, I suppose. Well, don't cut up your socks and spoil them. You'll need them when you go home—back to Scotland."

Marie looked sadly up at Sylvia. Her eyes filled with tears.

"I'll lend you stockings," said Sylvia quickly. "They will be rather big for you, but you can wear them till your mother sends you some from home."

"Mother is dead. Perhaps Aunt Matilda won't send me any."

"We'll manage something. Put those away and shut your drawer. I'll be back in a minute."

Marie obeyed with alacrity.

"It isn't true," she said to herself. "She won't come. It's a dream. It's a pretend."

But Sylvia came, with stockings, and suspenders dangling from a blue belt.

"I wear this kind at gym," she said. "We must tighten them a bit, as the stockings will be too long, probably."

They *were* very long, both in the leg and the foot, but Sylvia doubled over the toes and fastened them with a safety-pin, and turned down the tops, and secured the suspender clips skilfully and solemnly, as if she were doing a Latin exercise or an experiment in the lab. Marie watched her, and an unbearable lump grew in her throat.

"That's *that*," said Sylvia, regarding her handiwork. "Now, Marie, why did you go off by yourself to-day? You promised, you know, and I believed you'd keep your promise."

It was useless. Marie made one tremendous and unsuccessful final gulp, and broke down, not crying like a child, but with difficult attempts at restraint, like a grown woman.

Sylvia said nothing. She put one arm round the child, and led her out of the Green Dorm, across the corridor, up two steps, into her own study bedroom, where, seating herself in a big basket chair, she took her on her lap, and, without a word of sympathy or remonstrance, let her cry until, from sheer

exhaustion, the tears ceased, and Marie lay quiet, staring at the rose-coloured curtains and the bowl of roses in the window, conscious of the friendliness of the stern young face near hers, of the protectiveness of the clasping arms. Then Sylvia spoke.

"Did you want to buy stockings with the money for your doll's head?" she asked.

"Y-yes," faltered Marie. "But they were three and six, and so I couldn't buy them. And I had some other things to do—some letters to post, and some flowers to put on the baby's grave."

"I see," said Sylvia, who believed in asking very few questions. "I know there are things, sometimes, that you can't do with other people. But, Marie, you could always do them by yourself if I knew you would meet me again, when you said you would. It will be so difficult now, when you have promised and broken your promise."

"I saw Diana coming out," explained Marie, her voice still unsteady. "And I thought you would all be out in a minute—and there wouldn't be time to get the stockings."

She trembled, and Sylvia clasped her reassuringly.

"Marie, I don't know why you shouldn't

have asked me to show you a draper's shop."

"But Diana and Kitty were there too."

Sylvia thought a minute, and decided. "Listen, Marie. It's really important that you shouldn't do one or two things in school —I mean, it's sickening for other people if you do. For instance, I was responsible for you this morning, and I must report myself to Miss Dangerfield on Monday, or to-night, if she's get-at-able, because I lost you."

"She won't be angry with *you?*" Marie's eyes grew round.

"No," said Sylvia truthfully. "I don't think she will. I don't make a practice of mislaying the Green Dorm. But I hate things to go wrong. They *have* gone rather wrong this week, haven't they?"

Marie's lip quivered.

"When you're in difficulties," said Sylvia, "come and ask me. You see, it's been easy enough to get the stockings. Most things will be easy."

Marie lifted a tear-stained, happy face.

"About the other girls in the Green Dorm," Sylvia said, hesitatingly. "Don't despair. You'll all be tremendous friends some day. Only you must be brave. Stick it out. It's worth it."

"Ay," said Marie, with a wise and elfish look.

Sylvia laughed.

"Cut along to the Dorm now," she said. "Remember—stick it out."

"She didn't say a word about the others," she thought, as she changed from her hockey things. "Poor little beggar—she'll come through all right."

And Marie, walking along the corridor on air, felt that she could "stick" anything—in Sylvia's stockings, and Sylvia's suspenders.

CHAPTER V

HER FIRST SWIMMING LESSON

The Green Dorm,
My Qbikkel.
School. October 5.

My Darling Jacintha,—Sylvia Leigh has been a good frende to me. She said to stikk it out, and I obey with an eger Hart. The stokkings she gave me with such grate kindness wear well, and Ant Matilda has given me her solemn othe and promise that she will Nitt me two paires more by neggst week. I asked my good ant if the doctor's stiffycait about my gaims mite be nott kownted, as I wish to play gaims, and I have nott New Moanya now. So she said a doctor was to gett eggsaminning me, and he eggsaminned my Tung, and other important I temms of Mine he eggsamined through his teloskope. And he said you can play gaims, they'll be the maiking of you. I have fear in my sole, butt I will be brave and stikk it out.

Rite to me soon. I weary for letters.—Yours lovingly and faithfully,

MARIE STEWART MACLEOD.

P.S.—I am to lerne to swimm this afternoon, and will rite to you agane soon if I am spairt.

Marie looked up from addressing her letter to meet Maude Semple's eyes. Those eyes were constantly watching her. They gave her a vague feeling of discomfort, for she had not forgotten the first treachery, and feared that Maude would see her do something foolish, and disclose it. She knew that she must never play with Brownie in public, and that Jacintha and the baby must be secrets. But she could not face giving up her letters to Jacintha, and somehow she felt it her duty to see that the baby's grave was kept fresh and gay. The other girls would not find out, but Maude might. She must be careful.

Maude, for her part, had memories. She had come to Ledbrooke from another school, and she knew, with natural astuteness sharpened by experience, what a new girl must expect. She was aware that certain qualities would stand her in good stead during

the first difficult term, and she did not undervalue the effect of her sprightly prettiness, her well-chosen wardrobe, and her fair skill in games.

She could place a "freak," and was fully acquainted with the average lively Lower Third Former's love of "ragging." Even in the train she had taken stock of Marie's tartan skirt, her socks and brogues, and the odd little face, dreamy and sensitive, with its pathos and gleam of elfin humour, had seemed to her to indicate a character that would serve as an excellent foil to her own.

Abnormally eager for popularity, and easily hurt by ridicule, she had thought that Marie might serve as scapegoat for the absurdities incident to new girls, and that her own trifling blunders might pass unnoticed. She had been the first to cast a significant amused glance at the fatal socks, and the discovery of Marie in the very act of playing with Brownie and Judith had confirmed her suspicions and enabled her to add fuel to the mischievous fire too ready to spring into life in the Green Dorm, in spite of the head girl's restraining influence.

The sequel of the Judith episode had aroused other emotions. She had not expected so painful an outbreak of fury from so small

and apparently shy a girl; she had not looked for the unanimous "owning-up" of Diana and Kitty, Lyn and Becky. Here the Ledbrooke girls manifested a quality inconspicuous in the set she had admired in her former school. Sylvia's "Get up, and don't lie there howling" had not shown the sympathy that a person whose hair has been nearly uprooted and whose nose is bleeding has a reasonable right to expect. Maude felt a new dislike for Marie—something stronger and more vindictive than her former contempt.

She felt that Sylvia, impartial as that young Minerva had been, inclined to Marie's side. She noticed with dismay the sudden assumption of the necessary stockings. Very narrowly did she watch the removal of Marie's shoes in the Dorm that night, and when her enemy had gone to have her bath, she had slipped into her cubicle and examined the stockings. She was gratified to find each one marked with a strip bearing the name "Leigh" in red letters. . . . So that was how the infant had been enabled to discard its socks!

Treasuring her information, Maude crept back to her own quarters, resolved to bide her time. . . . Her nose was still a little sore, but the wound to her self-esteem was sorer.

"Get up, and don't lie there howling!" Well, Marie Macleod should see.

On the Tuesday morning a rumour went round the Lower Third that the Danger Signal had simply flamed with rage at Marie, both in public and private, and that the culprit had gone very white, but had not attempted an explanation nor dropped a tear. Whereupon Kitty Keyes had reminiscenced about the "bucketsful of brine" she had shed under the first attack from headquarters, and, during the ensuing Latin lesson, had sympathetically offered the victim half a chocolate mouse. The sudden flash of shy pleasure that had passed over Marie's face had galled Maude. Suppose Kitty got friendly with the other new girl!

Kitty was always, as she herself so cheerfully put it, "reversed top" of the form, and consequently occupied the seat next to Marie and Maude, placed in the last two desks, as not having yet made a position for themselves.

There was some consolation when Diana Kyrle, in the top place, collapsed on Marie's petition to authority that she might be "allowed into" the cloak-room to "sort" her stockings, but the laughter had not been altogether unfriendly, and, when the Scot explained to the English mistress that learning

to spell gave her a "sore head," Diana's expression had been almost sympathetic.

The baby was clever, too. She did sums with lightning rapidity, and her hand was always waving above her head, eager sign that she could impart the information required in English or History. She often said mad things, but mistresses did not seem to mind.

The "doctor's stiffycait" was a consolation, for anyone who did not play games might be contemptuously regarded as a "funk," or a "swot." But, at the end of the first fortnight, Marie appeared in the gym, properly costumed, flushed and excited. And this afternoon she was to go to the Baths. If she made good in both physical and mental achievement, Maude feared that it would be difficult to despise her.

She would have been reassured if she could have known the terror that lurked in Marie's heart. Gym was not bad, but she hated the hockey field, the hard rush of the white ball and the thwack of the sticks, and she shrank with equal loathing from the thought of the depths of dreadful water, green and curling. But she wanted to be courageous. "Be a brive little gell, and ye'll be 'appy." "Stick it out." Mrs. Pugh and Sylvia, such different people, were at one on that subject. Marie

felt sure they were right. If she really learned pluck the girls would not laugh at her, and Diana would like her, if she were clever enough, and good at games.

"Can you swim?" inquired the said Diana abruptly, bursting into the schoolroom with a towel and a blue bathing-dress over her shoulder.

"A little," said Maude, with right modesty.

"No," said Marie.

"Soon learn, I expect," said Diana. In her innermost heart Diana was rather sorry that Judith's head had been broken. She had imagination, and she could not help guessing that Marie had suffered, though, used as she was to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune in a family of twelve, she did not know how much.

"Got a swimming dress?" she asked.

Marie assented.

"But it's striped," she added nervously, as Diana spread out what was obviously the regulation school garment, with the school monogram standing out in impressive bright blue against a dark background.

"It doesn't matter till you can swim," Diana conceded. "Then you must get a school club one."

"What's that?" asked Marie, indicating a ribbon above the monogram.

"Oh, that's nothing," said Diana modestly. "High diving. It isn't difficult. Sylvia said she'd teach me swallow diving to-day."

"How topping!" said Maude, with a flattering intonation.

Marie turned her round-eyed regard of admiration upon Diana, into whose short mop of bright curls the sunlight seemed to soak as she stood by the window. She could do anything; she would be just like Sylvia when she grew up. Neither of them knew how to be shy, or frightened, or unhappy.

"You'll soon learn," Diana told Marie. "It's easy. Come and get your hat, and walk down with me, and I'll show you the decentest box near the shallow end."

Maude watched them go out of the room together. She felt snubbed. Diana, though she did not know it herself, had a lordly and exclusive way of bestowing her favours, very flattering to those who received them. Marie glowed under her patronage. It was wonderful that she, Marie Stewart Macleod, who, only a month ago, had been playing a baby game called Muncheon under the table with dolls, was now stepping down the street with

a towel under her arm, shoulder to shoulder with that Diana Kyrle, who was top of the Lower Third and wore a ribbon for high diving.

But her happiness was short-lived. Diana forgot about her from the moment she had indicated a box that was desirable, owing to the presence of a looking-glass, that showed Marie the top of her head and her eyebrows if she tiptoed, and an efficient bolt. Diana always forgot at the sight of water—forgot all but the sensation of the swift flash through the air and the green depths closing round her, deaf and cool, and the triumph of following lifted hands to sudden light and the sound of laughter and voices, and the dash or quiet slipping of her strong little body through the rough ripples she had made. It was strange that she, just alone, silent diver as she was, should break that green flat mirror into so many pieces!

Maude, swimming easily and gracefully in the deep end, saw her preoccupation in triumph. The rest of the Green Dorm swung on the rings. The prefects practised diving, and, after each effort, asked Sylvia, who sat on the highest step of the platform clasping her bare knees and watching them, what *she* thought of that.

The remaining boarders performed various aquatic feats, each with a view to bettering someone else, and each shouted to attract a friend's attention, while, according to her skill, she wormed through a hoop, or achieved the breadth of the baths in four strokes, or did really, honestly swim across without touching the bottom with one foot.

Everyone was too much occupied to take any notice of a pitiful small figure clad in a scanty striped garment, standing shivering on the brink, with its arms clasped across its chest, its toes a little turned in, and its teeth chattering as it regarded the water—cold, dark, green—horrible. . . .

Suddenly Miss Gatey, the young mistress, who had said that Marie was "priceless," and who, in charge, was standing watching the scene with the expression of a naturalist inspecting an aquarium full of attractive polywogs, realized the situation. She strode round to Marie.

"Can you swim?" she asked unnecessarily.

"N-n-no," Marie stammered. "I've never been in the w-w-water before."

"Oh, come," remonstrated Miss Gatey. "It isn't very different from an ordinary bath, you know."

"There's such a lot of it," said Marie, looking hopelessly across, and edging a little farther from the mistress, who, judging from her energetic methods of teaching, might reasonably be suspected of designs to push her in.

"Hold my hand," suggested Miss Gatey kindly, "and go down the steps. You'll feel quite happy when once you're wet."

"Is that so?" shivered Marie, with unintentional irony.

"Really."

To think of that cold monster gradually creeping up—from ankles to knees, from knees to waist, from waist to neck! And how easily you might slip on those shiny steps! Then the water would pull you down—so gladly and quickly would it pull you down with its icy arms, and lie heavily on you till you choked or were drowned—and then it would loosen its hold, and you would float up, up, dead, swollen like a dead dog that Marie had seen in the canal near Glasgow. No—she couldn't—not to be brave, not to be like Diana Kyrle, not for anything——

"Marie! Half a sec. Wait!"

Sylvia sprang to her feet, dived, and, with a great thrusting stroke that the others stopped their inferior exercises to watch in

envious admiration, came towards the two on the brink at the shallow end.

"It's all right, Miss Gatey. I'll take her in. You'll come with me, won't you, Marie? I *can't* sink. Look!" and she executed a few porpoise dives, and came up, laughing and shaking the water from her face. "But I shan't let you go underneath. I shall carry you from one end to the other, just to let you feel how jolly the water is."

Marie looked hesitatingly at Sylvia. She was so different, with her hair screwed away under the orange cap that came down like a helmet over her brows—but she was Sylvia, all the same, with her straight sure look, and her arms stretched out as they had been on that dreadful Saturday, when Marie had cried in her cubicle.

"Marie! You *know* I won't let you down, don't you?"

Yes, Marie knew. With a little nervous moan she could not suppress, she surrendered herself and hung round Sylvia's neck, staring with scared eyes at the three feet of water, which seemed to her unfathomable depths. Sylvia did not move.

"Now let's go in," she said, "before I take you across. Ready!"

Slowly she lowered Marie into the water

and brought her up again, shivering and clinging, with the expression of a man who has been on the rack for half an hour and has not yet cried out.

Sylvia laughed.

"Not so bad?" she asked.

Suddenly conscious of an exhilarating glow, Marie agreed that it wasn't.

"Now," said Sylvia, putting her gently down. "Stand in front of me. Put your arms round my neck, ever so loosely, and"—lifting her—"your legs round my waist. No, no, if you cling so tightly I'll bust. That's better. Head right back—hold on—not too hard."

And she pushed off, swimming with a steady breast stroke, smiling in spite of the frenzied clutch from which Marie, now and then conscious that she was suffering herself to be carried through these terrible depths, could not entirely refrain. She swam the length of the bath, and then set down her burden on the top step of the ladder into the water at the seven feet end.

"Now you'll be all right," she said. "Recover from that for a minute, and then hop out and I'll show you the stroke."

"Good!" exclaimed Kitty, who, hanging by her hands from the steps, was contorting

herself into the attitude which her friends understood to threaten a somersault, never yet executed. "Jolly, isn't it?"

"You'll soon learn to swim when you don't funk the deep end," said Lyn approvingly. "You can practise in the Green Dorm."

Diana, swinging her legs from the diving-board, watched Sylvia wistfully. She wished that she would remember her promise about the swallow dive. She might try by herself, but it was jolly to be taught things by Sylvia, especially if you could do them quickly and well. She had been looking forward to this afternoon—Sylvia hadn't spoken to her for a week, except when she had come suddenly into the Dorm during undressing operations, and found her in the act of proving to Kitty that she *could* say "dominus," or any other second declension noun, standing on her head, which Miss Gatey declared any Lower Third girl ought to be able to do after all the instruction given to the class. Then she had ejaculated, "Don't be a silly ass," and Diana, depressed, had resumed her normal position, and soberly removed the few garments she had on. But Sylvia really couldn't have been annoyed by that.

"All out!" and Miss Gatey's whistle

sounded. Sylvia, who had been scientifically instructing her protégée on the side, helped her to her feet, and Marie, radiant with happiness, pattered off to her box at the shallow end. Diana slowly walked down from the diving-board. There was no chance now—and probably next week Sylvia would forget again —no, she wouldn't forget, she'd think it more important that the new girl should be taught to swim.

"Can you do your swallow dive?" asked Maude, as Diana, clothed again, stood by the wringer waiting her turn to deal with her wet swimming-dress.

"No. Sylvia hadn't time to show me," returned Diana briefly.

"Oh, what a shame! I'll do that for you," and Maude stretched out her hand for the swimming-dress.

"Thanks very much."

"Of course, she is so awfully taken up with Marie Macleod that she hasn't time for anyone else."

"Is she?" said Diana, with a sudden dreadful stab. "I hadn't noticed it."

"Be quick, girls," called Miss Gatey. "Form into line. Diana, you're always first *in* the building and last *out*."

The crocodile, on which Miss Gatey in-

sisted—she loved forming people into line—shuffled itself into shape. Diana and Maude stood together at the end. Maude waited. She knew Diana wouldn't be able to refrain from comment or question on what she had said, though she tried to look proud and indifferent. She was right.

"Sylvia believes in helping new people a lot," Diana remarked as they turned from the long Pump Room and Baths buildings into the main street of Ledbrooke Spa. "She thinks they ought to find their level—she's always saying so. But she shows them the ropes."

"Yes, that's very fair, isn't it? Sylvia *is* fair, though she's strict. At least, that's how it seems to me."

"She's all the darlings that ever lived," said Diana.

"I don't know her well enough yet to say how tremendously nice she is. Of course, you're really friendly with her, aren't you?"

"I went to tea with her once in her study," said Diana heavily. "It was last year, when I was top of the Second. We slept in the White Dorm then, and it was rather rowdy. Lyn's sister Marjorie bossed it. Sylvia told me all about the Green—it got the Dorm prize last year for being first in

games and brains and everything. She was only an ordinary prefect then, but it was her Dorm and it got the prize."

"How topping to go to tea with her! I wonder if Marie Macleod has——"

"What makes you think so?" Diana spoke sharply.

"Well, I saw her coming out of Sylvia's study that Saturday afternoon. Oh, but, of course, it was before tea. I was only wondering. Marie must have had a good long time alone with her to tell her——"

"To tell her what?"

"Why, about how we ragged her over those socks!"

"Marie didn't tell her that!"

"Didn't she?"

"No. She knows about the doll business —not everything, but we told her most. She doesn't know about the socks. How could she? She won't listen to tales. She says people who do are the *limit*."

"Oh!" Maude's tone suggested that she was respectfully convinced, but surprised.

"Why? What do you mean?" Diana's heart sank as she remembered how she had tormented Marie—and Sylvia hadn't spoken to her for a week. Was it just chance?

"Well, isn't it tremendously queer that

she should have given Marie her own stockings, if she *didn't* realize that we had teased her a bit?"

"Given Marie her stockings?"

"Didn't Marie tell you? I thought she would. She was rather braced about it, naturally. Ask her to show you. They're marked 'Leigh.'"

"Do you mean to say that Marie Macleod told *Sylvia* about us—and Sylvia listened?"

Maude hesitated. Diana had such an unpleasantly direct way of putting things.

"I don't mean to say anything," she answered. "I don't know anything about it, except that I saw Marie coming out of Sylvia's room, and she was looking awfully happy, though she had been crying. Also that she's wearing Sylvia's stockings—probably till they can save up enough at home to buy her some."

"I didn't think Marie Macleod was like that," said Diana, ignoring Maude's final gibe, which, indeed, she had scarcely heard. "I knew she was rather kiddish, of course, but I thought she was decent."

"So did I," agreed Maude cordially.

They mounted the stairs to the Green Dorm.

"Nervous lady enters water," cried Becky Dermott, who could and did mimic

everyone and everything, from Miss Dangerfield to a laboratory tadpole. And she balanced herself on the edge of the basin fixed opposite Diana's bed, and began an impersonation which excited squeals of laughter, in which Marie, after one horrible moment of fear lest Becky had noticed her own terror, joined.

"Don't be a funny ass," said Diana, whose face was quite grave. "I want to wash."

"Far be it from me to stand in the way of reforms," said Becky, putting her hand on Diana's shoulder, and jumping to the ground.

"Ass!" repeated Diana, turning on the tap, and avoiding Becky's eyes.

Shrinking into an attitude of mock fear, Becky crept to the other end of the dormitory.

"What's the matter with our Diana?" she inquired of Maude.

Maude gave a slight shrug of her shoulders.

"I don't know," she said.

CHAPTER VI

A REHEARSAL THAT FAILED

IN a way, Marie began to be happy.

It was queer how all of a sudden Kitty and Lyn and Becky had become so much kinder to her. They did not like her as they liked one another—that would have been too much to expect—and occasionally they teased her about some word or pronunciation which sounded odd to their Southern ears, and they were bewilderingly untrustworthy. Why did Becky go out of her way to declare that the large round decorated object hanging in the hall was the head mistress's best hat, of a fashion in vogue when she was appointed to the post she held at Ledbrooke, which she had preserved for sentimental reasons? It wasn't true—Sylvia, to whom the story was retailed, said rubbish, it was a savage's shield —and why was Becky so amused when Marie, sure of her facts, sought her out to correct her information?

Why did Lyn say that she couldn't fag to do her lessons, and didn't intend to try this

morning, when she obviously liked them, and tried rather hard? But these things did not matter—compared with Diana.

Diana didn't tease her, even when the others did. She was always polite, and sometimes helpful. But the sudden good fellowship she had shown on that day when they were going to the baths had not returned, and Marie longed for it, more than she longed for anything but Sylvia's approval. Diana looked at her queerly sometimes, as if she were trying to find out something, and when Marie, with a shy little smile, looked back, she would glance quickly away and speak to someone else.

There was nothing in that, perhaps, but a disappointment was always in Marie's heart, although it was so indefinable that it could not be explained even to Jacintha, to whom letters went regularly, long and short, gay and sad, with all the news and moods that would not have done for Aunt Matilda.

On fortnightly Saturdays Marie would post these letters at "Jacintha's house," as she called it, and often she would have time to go a little farther, and see that the baby's grave was tidy. She had cut the long grass with her nail-scissors, and, when flowers no longer bloomed, she had removed the jar and hidden

it in the thick ivy of old Mr. Blenkinsop's tomb.

Sylvia knew of these visits. Marie had spoken so naturally of the "baby's grave" that it seemed that her family had told her to attend to it—it might be that of a little brother or sister of her own. The Macleods must be connected with Ledbrooke in some way, or they would not have chosen that Marie should be educated there. To send a child to the cemetery seemed odd to Chris, with whom Sylvia sometimes discussed the "snippet," but, after all, Marie was Scottish, belonging to a people which takes its Sunday afternoon strolls through burying-grounds and puts funerals on its entertainment list. Once Sylvia had walked with Marie to see exactly where she went; after this she let her go alone, and knew that she could rely upon her to be at the meeting-place in time.

Except on these occasions, Marie saw little of the head girl, who, working for scholarship examinations, devoted the least time possible to games. Once more at the baths she had forgotten Diana's swallow dive and had given Marie a lesson; after that she would swim a few lengths, dive once or twice, dress, and go quickly back for a private afternoon coaching, before the others were out of the water. But

Chris lent Marie wings, and Kitty and Lyn would hold her up. Becky offered her assistance, but Marie was by this time brave enough to refuse.

"You'd drop me under the water to get hints for the imitation of a drowning person," she said. And Becky, though she protested, seemed quite pleased with this estimation of her behaviour.

Diana did not help her, though occasionally she would tell her politely that she was getting on extremely well. A new sensation was troubling Diana. Never before in the course of her twelve years had she had cause to be jealous. Gay and attractive, quick to master the difficulties of books, and excellent in the games she had played with her brothers, she was liked by both the mistresses and girls. She was a recognized leader, which was the reason why Sylvia, confronted with the possibility of difficulty with the Green Dorm during her year as head girl, had asked her to tea. When she had gained Diana she knew that she had gained Lyn and Kitty and Becky, who, in one crowded year of glorious life, had assisted the top girl of the Second to paint the White Dorm red. And she had won Diana, whose affection, not easily given, for she was proud and self-reliant, was deep and

strong. The others followed, but, though Sylvia was " decent " to them all, Diana was not jealous.

But Maude's information had had its effect. Sylvia's preoccupation with Marie at the baths had disappointed her; the idea of Sylvia listening to an account of her misdeeds without giving her a chance—even after she had confessed her share in the Judith episode —hurt her as if it had been a physical wound. With morbid preoccupation she watched Marie.

She saw the new stockings arrive; she saw Marie take a parcel, tied up with ribbon extracted from her best nightgown, to Sylvia's room. She saw the protecting expression which would come into Sylvia's eyes when they looked at Marie. She saw Kitty, next to Marie in the back row of the Lower Third, applaud the odd facial contortions with which Marie, her sense of fun quickening as she became happier, would entertain her between or sometimes during lessons.

And she realized that, in spite of spelling, Marie's position was creeping up and up, until, one Monday morning, her heart turned cold as Miss Dangerfield, who once a week came to read marks, announced: " First, Marie Macleod. Second, Diana Kyrle," and paused

to compliment the youngest girl in the form, and to warn Diana to look to her laurels. In the shortest possible time Diana had snatched back those laurels, but she was uneasy.

Maude, watching events, congratulated herself. She was often with Diana now, judiciously flattering her, doing small tasks for her, effacing herself at the right moment. Sore as she was, Diana found the admiration which would, at the beginning of the term, have irritated her, soothing and even stimulating. After all, Maude was a decent sort, though she had made an unnecessary fuss over that bleeding nose. She played games quite well, was generous in bestowing sweets, and evidently thought a lot of those attainments which some people thought Marie Macleod could eclipse. Diana approved of the skilful passing which gave her a fair chance to shoot goals, sucked the expensive chocolate almonds which arrived fortnightly from London, listened to compliments profusely and yet cleverly bestowed, and was unhappy.

Although she had nipped a possible friendship between Diana and Marie, Maude was not contented; she wanted to see Marie abased, as Marie had temporarily abased her, and the chances were not so plentiful as they had been.

Still, they came.

As the end of the term drew on the Green Dorm prepared for a night revel of a kind that had been popular in the White Dorm days, and, if carefully carried out, need not result in discovery and the loss of the reputation Sylvia was building up. " Refined and harmless," Becky called it.

Refreshments were necessary, but they must be of a kind to be concealed with speed, and, as Diana said, non-odorous. For entertainment every occupant of the Dorm must perform some feat in absolute silence. This offered scope to the inventive. Becky knew that her mimicry of staff and prefects in gesture and expression would be popular, and meant to recite " The Charge of the Light Brigade " in a desperate whisper accompanied by furious action. Diana and Kitty had some secret scheme which sent them into fits of uncontrollable laughter at ill-timed moments, and, after consideration, they admitted Maude to a part of it.

Marie, who was informed by Kitty during a geography lesson as to what was expected of her, was struck with the idea of impersonating a lunatic. Kitty had often complimented her on the " utter madness " of the faces she could make when she was in the right mood.

Accordingly, she printed a big card to be fixed on her bed, conveying a spirited stage direction:

THUNDER. ENTER 1 LUNATIC—

and, with delighted giggles, made secret preparations for her act.

It is always difficult to obtain privacy at boarding-school, but Marie was resourceful. One December evening she finished her prep quickly, and asked the mistress in charge if she might go up to the dormitory and fetch an elaborate handkerchief sachet embroidered with the word "Mouchoir," and destined for Aunt Matilda.

The boarders were encouraged to make presents for their relations, as the performance of the task meant comparative peace after prep was over. Miss Gatey, who foresaw trouble when the girls sat in the schoolroom idle, at once gave permission, and Marie went off in triumph to rehearse her secret act, and, incidentally, to find the handkerchief sachet.

Quietly she crept into her cubicle, switched on the light, and detached a blanket from her bed. Then, like Edgar, in *King Lear*, she proceeded to "elf her hair in knots," an operation which, on looking in the glass, she

felt herself to have performed with extraordinary success.

"I'm just like one," she thought, delighted.

Then her blanket depressed her. Supposing she were mistaken for a Red Indian! Indians had oddly arranged hair, and probably made horrible grimaces as they strode to the battlefield or leaped fiercely on their victims.

"I must make myself look even madder," she thought.

Her eyes fell on her soap-dish. With a judicious application of soap and tooth-paste she could appear to foam at the mouth—it would be horrible. She would try now—and she had better remove her blouse and her shoes and stockings and cower under the blanket as if she were cold.

She was so much engrossed in the preparation that she did not see the door of the Green Dorm open, slowly and cautiously, remain for a moment ajar, and then swing wide so that the bright electric light of the cubicle streamed out into the dim corridor.

A few minutes later Miss Hornsby, the strictest of the resident mistresses, met Maude on the stairs.

"Where are you going, Maude?" Miss

Hornsby always wanted to know where girls were going.

"To practise, Miss Hornsby."

"But surely you have left on the light in your dormitory? That is most careless."

"Oh, no, Miss Hornsby, I haven't. I haven't been into the dormitory."

"Quietly down to practise, then," said Miss Hornsby. "Quickly and quietly."

And, with steps to which the same words might have been applied, she made her way towards the Green Dorm, entered, and sharply pulled aside one curtain of Marie's cubicle.

"Marie Macleod!" she exclaimed.

It was unfortunate that she took Marie by surprise. Balanced on the bed-rail, the "lunatic" was endeavouring to view herself from all sides in the mirror which hung on the opposite wall. In her hand she held the mirror belonging to Kitty's cubicle. The sudden cry of astonishment, disgust, and anger caused her to start violently, with the result that she lost her footing and fell backwards to the ground.

There was a thud, a crash of broken glass, and a little sharp howl of fright. Immediately the door of the opposite study burst open, and Sylvia, still clutching the lexicon she had

been using, ran into the dormitory that was her charge.

There stood Miss Hornsby, surveying with indignant horror a miserable object in a blanket, who, with round scared eyes, cowered among bits of broken wood and sharp fragments of glass. The bedclothes were rumpled into a heap. On a chair, with bright silks and neatly folded sewing implements, was the handkerchief sachet destined as a Christmas present for Miss Matilda Macleod.

Miss Hornsby looked coldly at Sylvia. An instinctive supervisor herself, she distrusted the power of the prefects, and resented Miss Dangerfield's belief in their ability to keep the juniors in order out of school hours. Having crossed swords with Sylvia in the days when the head girl was small and naughty, she did not see the force of forgetting those days too easily.

"Your arrival is a little late," she said. "Or—perhaps I am mistaken—does Chris Cunningham supervise *this* dormitory?"

Sylvia flushed and stiffened. She knew that Miss Hornsby was quite certain that Chris Cunningham did not supervise the Green Dormitory.

"Supervision times are half-past four to

five, and eight to eight-thirty, Miss Hornsby," she said.

Miss Hornsby inclined her head.

"Just so," she assented. "And the fact that your study is directly opposite the dormitory does not make supervision *obligatory*. *I* understand."

Sylvia's flush faded, and her lips tightened. She said nothing, and the mistress, satisfied that she had driven her dart right home, turned to Marie.

"Have you any explanation to offer?" she inquired. "What is the meaning of this extraordinary and, I think I may say, disgusting behaviour?"

Marie, who had struggled to her feet, and was fighting with tears of pain and fright, seized a towel and rubbed her face. She gave one piteous glance at the head girl, but Sylvia, the goddess rebuked, was not looking at her. That fact helped her to become conscious of physical pain.

"My leg does hurt me so!" she burst forth. "I had permission to come up to fetch the case for Aunt Matilda—I mean, her mouchoir case—and I thought I should have time to rehearse my part for the theatricals. I'm a lunatic."

"Dear me!" observed Miss Hornsby

dryly, while, at the word "theatricals," Sylvia looked at Marie with an expression of alarm. "A *lunatic!* Dear me!"

Marie, drawing her blanket round her bare arms, shed a few noiseless tears.

"Deceit," said Miss Hornsby, "is rather worse than folly, as English girls, for the most part, know, and as *you* may doubtless be brought to realize."

"I had to be alone for a wee bittie," sobbed Marie. "I couldn't get doing my part with all the others there."

"My part! Theatricals!" Miss Hornsby articulated slowly. "Perhaps you are concerned in this scheme?" And she turned to Sylvia.

Sylvia did not answer.

"Are you?" persisted the mistress.

"No," said Sylvia, in an unnaturally quiet voice. "I know nothing about it."

"But I think you should," said Miss Hornsby persuasively. "Don't you agree?"

Marie, realizing that in the sheer panic of discovery she had betrayed her fellow-conspirators, sank to the ground and abandoned herself to her grief.

"Don't you?" Miss Hornsby repeated.

"Perhaps it might be as well."

"I agree with you entirely. It—might—

be—as—well. Exactly. Marie Macleod, will you finish undressing, and get into bed? Sylvia, may I trouble you to send Diana Kyrle, Kitty Keyes, Becky Dermott, and Lilian Somerton to my room? No—excuse me—I will see Diana Kyrle alone."

Sylvia gritted her teeth together as she left the dormitory. She was tired and nervous under the strain of double preparation for the January Matriculation and the summer scholarship exams., and, proud as she justly was of her discipline, and her supervision of her Green Dorm, she felt Miss Hornsby's taunts to be unendurable.

What in the world did Marie Macleod think she was doing? Had she not been given opportunity to indulge her queer fancies without deliberately transgressing school rules? Had the child taken the bit between her teeth? She had noticed the growing friendliness of the lively Kitty, and the tendency towards irrepressible mirth on the part of anyone near Marie during her face-making moods.

"She was probably not shy or sad at all," thought Sylvia, irritated at the thought of what she was now inclined to consider her "softness." "She is probably just a tiresome child, and she's cock-a-hoopish because I've looked after her."

A Rehearsal that Failed

Miss Hornsby's voice snapped in her ears, and she clenched her hands. "Deceit—English girls—— Still the same stunt about English honour," she thought, her Scottish blood aflame as it used to be in the old days, when, in Miss Hornsby's form, she had winced under what were generally unfair taunts.

"Anyway," a sudden thought struck her, "Marie Macleod hasn't gone very far in deceit. Why on earth did she leave the door wide open?"

CHAPTER VII

AT SCHOOL FOR THE HOLIDAYS

IT was well for Marie that the end of the term was at hand.

Miss Hornsby dealt with the Green Dorm. Her bad mark against it was recorded in the Dormitory book. Its occupants were detained from hockey to write a short essay on behaviour and responsibility. The mistress herself came in at supervision periods, when she would go from cubicle to cubicle, and ask Sylvia if she had any complaints to make. The last girls to fall asleep would hear the door open at eleven o'clock, and Becky declared that the Hornet, as she was called, got up in the night and prowled noiselessly along to the Green Dorm in the hope of discovering some crime.

"What galls me," grumbled Kitty, the night before the holidays, "is that we had absolutely no enjoyment. And yet there has been all this fuss."

"Marie Macleod had," Lyn observed.

"Marie Macleod is a priceless ass," said

Becky. "I'm sorry about it, Marie, for I was just beginning to like you."

"You needn't have given us away," said Maude, whose conscience, which had given her one big stab when Miss Hornsby had entered the Dorm to find Marie, had been quietened by the fact that this time no circumstantial evidence was needed to prove that Marie really had "told."

Diana lay thinking of how Marie had complained to Sylvia. Kitty, Lyn, and Becky knew nothing of that. She wondered why she did not want to tell them.

"I'm afraid the Green Dorm won't get the shield this year," she said. "Sylvia will be sick about that."

"Sylvia's sick about *us*," said Lyn. "Marjorie says so, and Sylvia nearly dies of it when the Hornet comes in."

"I don't see why we shouldn't have the shield," argued Kitty, who was always optimistic. "After all, everything is counted —brains——"

"You'll help there," observed Lyn, a little unkindly.

"I don't doubt it," returned Kitty, unabashed. "Reversed top of the form I *may* be, but someone must take that position. Even if I were to score seventy per cent. as

my term total, I might still be there. There's no reason why I shouldn't have quite a helpful average mark."

"Except one," said Lyn, with point.

Kitty was silent.

"The other Dorms aren't *perfect*," said Diana, tactfully changing the subject. "The Reds all put on their swimming things and packed into one bath last night, as a protest against not being allowed to go to *the* baths. There has been a row about that, and Chris says she'll see to it that they are all drowned when they *do* go again."

"Anyway, they had some enjoyment out of it," sighed Kitty. "Then the Whites have done nothing—nor have the Pinks, nor the Blues."

"Well, you don't win shields for doing nothing," Becky stated wisely.

And with this consoling reflection they all fell asleep—all but Marie. Marie had not gone to sleep at the right time since that dreadful night when Miss Hornsby had found her adorned with the blanket, and hair "on end."

She would lie very still, her cheek rested on one small hand, her eyes looking into the darkness as if suddenly some light might appear, showing a friendly face. If only she had not been so scared at Miss Hornsby, and

had not said things without realizing what they meant. She would have suffered a good deal before involving the others in a "row," and yet, by some heartless caprice of fortune, she had done so, and it would be a long time, if ever, before they forgave her and trusted her again.

They did not "rag" her—it would have been better had they done so. They just left her alone, as if she were not of any use to them—and Sylvia left her alone too.

Well, she must "stick it out." And there was always Jacintha. In the holidays the others might forget; and next term she would start afresh, and work so hard that all the mistresses would be astonished, and do splendidly in games and gym—she could already jump as high as Diana—and gain marks of credit for the Green Dorm.

So comforting herself, she would fall asleep and dream that she was Diana's special pal, and privileged to fetch and carry for Sylvia, or that she was playing centre-forward on the hockey ground, or heading the Lower Third list. Then came morning—and loneliness.

On the very last day of the term a letter came to arrange that Marie should board at school for the holidays. Aunt Matilda had

been summoned to Aberdeen to nurse a sister suffering from influenza, Jenny had been granted a holiday, and the flat in Glasgow was shut up. None of the others realized what was to be Marie's fate, and they went off gaily, planning ways to spend Christmas, promising correspondence.

Till the last moment Marie hoped that Sylvia would say good-bye to her, but directly after morning school Sylvia hurried away to catch a train, and only those who waylaid her got a farewell handshake and smile. Far too shy to join them, Marie stood alone at the dormitory window, watching the tall figure in the travelling coat, and the graceful head with its gold-tinged hair.

Perhaps if she stared very hard, Sylvia would look up and wave. . . . She had read of the mesmeric power of the human eye. But her eye evidently lacked some necessary quality, for Sylvia did not raise her head as she got herself and her hockey-stick and her suit-case into the waiting taxi, waved a laughing farewell to the Green Dorm group congregated at the gate, and disappeared.

Marie dreamed a good deal during those holidays, curled on a rug in Matron's room, watching her sew or knit, or, with some trepidation, sitting at a table in Miss Danger-

field's study, a book spread open before her.

"I hear you are poor in spelling, Marie," the head mistress had said. "I hope we have not placed you too high. I want you to read, and notice the form of the words as you read them. I understand you have some proficiency in drawing, therefore you cannot lack observation."

Marie agreed with all this, and carried off a pile of English classics for private digestion. As Miss Dangerfield said, she did not lack observation, but unfortunately she had a freakish inventiveness, and words assumed strange shapes in her mind, as flames curl into goblins in the fire. She read while she was alone—in the presence of the head mistress she would often forget the printed page. So she would sit and gaze at the green shade of the lamp, thinking of the others, planning matter for her next letter to Jacintha, until Miss Dangerfield talked to her seriously about day-dreaming, and the superior beauty of doing things—useful things. Marie wondered how people decided what was useful, and who did it, and how they got the others to agree with them. Perhaps when she was grown up she would have a chance.

When the last holiday came she awaited

the return of the others with mixed feelings. She knew that she wanted to see them again —Lyn, practical and jolly, Kitty, fair and cheery, Becky's dark, quick eyes, and Diana's bright head. . . . And she wanted to hear Sylvia speak—she couldn't remember how she did it, in that lazy and yet certain way, which made people eager to do what she asked. But she was afraid—in a way it was lonelier when they came than it was when the whole building was deserted, save for Miss Dangerfield (who was away for part of the time), and Matron and one servant. How glorious it might be!

She crept into the schoolroom where the boarders prepared their lessons, and, excited with a new pleasure, took her block, and, paying some attention to spelling, wrote to Jacintha:

LEDBROOKE HIGH SCHOOL,
January 19*th*.

MY DEAREST JACINTHA,

I plukk up my pen to write to you, for I must snatch a moment from my last fleeting afternoon before the others return. I love you, and love to write you letters, but I will have no time then. You must know that I am

chief friend of Diana Kyrle, who is beloved by all, and most by me, and I by her. As she wants me to talk to her a lott, it is kwite difficult to find time for Myself. Then there are all my other friends to welcome—I do not know how I will contrive to skweeze them all in. I think I will be Kitty's partner at gym, and sit by Becky at meles, and walk to hokki and the Baths with Lyn. Then I will see them all, and we will be talking a great deal, until we are kwite daized. But my darling Sylvia Leigh I will see this afternoon. She will say, "Hullo Marie! Will you get filling my kettle for tea," and I will gladly run and turn on the tap like an arrow, and bring her the wee kettle full of cold water, clere as cristal. She will say, "thank you, Marie youre a usefull child and now make up the fire and come and see me when I have had my meal." So I will go then and she will say "Sit on the rugg and I will show you my luggsurious Christmas gifts." So I will do that and return to the Green Dorm with a sensation of Triumff. Every one will speak about their holidays, until I am kwite weary, but glad to have such good frendes.

Yours in haste

MARIE STEWART MACLEOD.

Having signed her name, Marie sat with shining eyes and bright spots of colour flaming on her cheeks. She was happier than she had been all the holidays—she had found something as satisfactory as things always used to be in her pretend world.

A confusion of cheerful sounds arose—the sliding scrunch of taxis on the gravel, the echo of gay voices, the clatter of feet on the polished stairs. Thrilled with anticipation, Marie ran to the open door of the schoolroom.

A few Fourth Form girls went quickly past her. They smiled at her, but they knew her only by name, and did not speak to her.

"Hullo!" said Kitty, almost concealed by the bundle of rugs she carried. "You're back early." And she staggered on up the stairs.

Lyn and Becky followed, so much engrossed in recounting holiday exploits that they did not see her. She looked wistfully after them, wondering if they would be quite friendly if she followed them and said "Hullo!" or if they would think her pushing, and snub her.

There were more footsteps, running, eager. Diana leapt past Marie, swinging her bright blue cap, her hair standing out like

an untidy halo. She paused at the turn of the banisters opposite the schoolroom, and leaned over.

"Sylvia!" she called. "Please may I fill your kettle and put it on before I unpack? *Please.*"

"If you will," came the exciting voice that made Marie's heart beat faster. "Only you mustn't be late for your own tea, Diana."

Marie ventured a step forward as Sylvia came up the stairs, talking with Chris.

"We must ask Miss Dangerfield at once," she was saying. "We ought to begin digging soon—we could grow a tremendous lot of vegetables. Half time hockey, half time digging."

They went on. A few more girls, in whom Marie was not particularly interested, followed. Last of all came Marjorie Somerton, sighing as she removed her gloves.

Marie stood looking straight in front of her, alone, crumpling Jacintha's letter in one hand.

CHAPTER VIII

A BUNCH OF SNOWDROPS

MOST people grow up before they discover that it is only work that can make loneliness endurable, but Marie was only ten when she sought relief in it. She did arithmetic as if her life depended on her arriving at the end of an exercise before the class had finished a couple of sums. She learned new verses of "Horatius" while the others recited those prepared overnight. She dashed off drawings at a speed which distracted Miss Wray, satisfied that a certain model would keep her class going for at least two periods. Her geography and botany books were exemplary with their correct and lovingly painted maps, diagrams, and illustrations of flowers, leaves, and fruits.

She used a dictionary when she wrote her English and history essays, and even evolved a plan for learning this same dictionary by heart.

"If I learned how to spell every difficult word in the language, I couldn't forget about

the little easy ones," she thought. So she struggled with abiogenesis, abomasus, abranchiate, and other atrocities on pages 1 to 3 of Chambers's, until Kitty, having discovered the plan, confiscated the dictionary and put it in a water-jug.

"It's for your own good," she said. "It'll take at least a fortnight for it to dry, and by that time you'll have more sense, and know who's your friend." The last because Marie had shown fight, relieved to quarrel with one of her room-mates, as they evidently did not wish to become intimate with her.

Things would have been easier if she had been made of coarser stuff. Like most schoolgirls, Kitty, Lyn, and Becky forgot and forgave easily, and would have included Marie in their little set if she had made advances, but that was exactly what she could not do. Shy and sensitive, she shrank back into herself, and the substance of Miss Petunia's criticism of her, "quick in the uptak', but awfu' dour," would have been repeated in different words by most of the mistresses and girls at Ledbrooke.

Sylvia knew another Marie, but Sylvia, engrossed in her work, had time for no more than necessary supervision of the Green Dorm, which Miss Hornsby, distracted by

rumours of a Midnight Banana Consuming Society in the White, had temporarily ceased to persecute. And Diana, in whose heart the first liking for Marie obstinately persisted, was jealous.

Not so much because of Sylvia now. Sylvia was kind enough to Marie, as she was to all the juniors with whom she came in contact, unless she had occasion to blaze at them, but the tender, amused look Diana, with the watchfulness of the most miserable of all passions, had hated to see, was apparent no longer. But Marie, placed third in the class at the end of the first term, was now a formidable rival. She would easily eclipse Lyn, who had achieved the second place only by virtue of one mark.

Diana, putting forth all her strength, doubted whether she would not, in turn, be outstripped. Her languages were excellent, but her drawing was mediocre, and she had not a good head for figures. Marie, as Miss Lester said, was cute—and when she added to this cuteness an unexpected and extraordinary passion for sheer hard work, she was likely to conquer and prove unconquerable.

Maude Semple levelled at her the schoolgirl-dreaded accusation of being a "swot"—she did not seem to care. Kitty pointed out

to her that "reversed top" was the most comfortable desk in the form, and had a healthy, sane atmosphere which compared most favourably with the hectic excitement of the front row—she smiled, as if at a good joke, and went on correcting the mistakes in her dictation exercise. Diana, who had relied on her skill in the subjects she found easy, had come up against the Scottish faculty of sticking at and obstinately overcoming difficulties. Marie Macleod, in spite of the loss of her dictionary, would learn to spell, and when Marie Macleod learned to spell the game was up.

In the gymnasium, too, Diana's superiority was threatened. Marie would never have enough staying power to excel in games, but her little thin figure was light and agile in drill and apparatus work, and showed a kind of "cuteness" in physical achievement which was oddly similar to that which Miss Lester had praised in the schoolroom. And Marie was good at high jumping, which Diana liked, because it was more competitive than most of the exercises, and she loved to fight and be first.

But Diana was made of good stuff, and the rough and tumble of her life at home had not encouraged petty jealousies. She would

have kept all these things in her heart, and laughed, and been friendly with her rival, if it had not been for Maude Semple. Maude's original bitterness against Marie was now sunk in her feeling for Diana, of whom she thought she was really fond. She wanted Diana to be top of the form and to win the junior gymnastic medal, and resented Marie's prowess as if it had been a personal insult to her friend.

"*You* ought to be top," she said. "*You* are really clever, and she is only a swot. Kitty could be top if she worked like that, as if there was nothing else important in the world."

There was little else important in the world for Marie—little that was real. Where the others had their friendships and adorations, their long discussions of school matters and confidences of private ambitions, she had only the shadow that was Jacintha, and the relief of writing letters, longer each week, in which she unpacked her ten-year-old soul, and which lay, mildewed and unopened, in the wooden letter-box of the "House with the Shut Eyes," as it was called in her mind.

As the days went on, her longing for human companionship and adventure became keener. Sometimes she felt that tending the little grave was a more satisfactory thing than

writing to Jacintha—it seemed more real. But one Saturday an episode occurred which made her afraid to go to the burial-place again.

It was a silver day in late February, and she had bought a penny bunch of snowdrops, the first flowers that had appeared in the streets that spring, and much better for the baby than the sprays of evergreen with which she had been obliged to content herself through the winter.

Without turning to right or left, she went straight to the place she now knew so well, and, drawing out the jar from the ivy where she had hidden it in November, filled it with water, and kneeling on the grass, arranged the flowers. Then she sat back on her heels to admire the effect. Seeing that the tiny head-stone was smeared and smirched by the winter rains, she took out her handkerchief and wiped it carefully.

"Puir wee thing," she crooned, as if she were tending a real live baby. "Puir wee thingie."

"What is your name?"

Marie glanced up, with the shy, fugitive look and gesture of a little wild thing startled in wood or field.

There stood the tall lady in black whom she

had seen long ago, when she first came to Ledbrooke, just before she discovered Jacintha's post-box. She remembered her at once, with her sad eyes and her floating veil and the glimpse of her pale gold hair.

She regarded Marie curiously, as she had done then, but now her face had something strange in its expression, something that Marie had not seen before, and that frightened her. It struck her that she had no right to be there, that tending a strange grave, however wee and neglected, might be offensive and punishable.

With a low embarrassed cry, she sprang up and ran away, not daring to look behind, lest the lady should be following her to ask her name and to report her to Miss Dangerfield, and involve her in further suffering.

The sad lady, however, did not follow her. She stood looking after her, still with the same strange expression. Then she turned, went up to Mrs. Pugh's little house, and knocked at the door.

"Good morning, Mrs. Pugh. Do you know who that little girl is?"

"'Ow, Mrs. Blair, 'ow yer did startle me, ter be sure," cried Mrs. Pugh, controlling 'Erb with one hand. "Oi'm gled ter see yer back from them 'Ighlands. Wot little gel—

'er that cooms ter look arter your little grive?"

Mrs. Blair nodded. She found it difficult to speak of that "little grive."

"Oi couldn't sye 'er nime. Oi allus thort thet she wuz a relition. She's at the 'Igh School. She cooms thet reg'lar—nah wi' a boonch of vilits, nah wi' chrysants, or 'olly if she can't git no oother thing."

"Oh," said Mrs. Blair, "it's very strange."

"Yess'm. We've awften said so—a good mem'ry loike, for one thet yoong. She rooned awye when she coom ter school, and two of the big gels coom dahn 'ere ter foind 'er, an' she begged me ter tike 'er as nuss fer 'Erb. 'D'yer want a strong gel?' ses she, speakin' in the Scotch wye, which I don't gow fer ter himitate—'d'yer wish a strong gel ter moind yon wee boy?' We've awften larfed over it, me 'usband an' me."

"Dear me," said Mrs. Blair, narrowing her eyes, as she had a way of doing when she was perplexed. "Is she unhappy, I wonder?"

"Allus alone, she is."

"Poor wee girl. She is wearing the Macleod tartan. I wonder—Mrs. Pugh, please ask her her name if she comes again. She's very shy, evidently, but do find out what

it is. I'll leave you my address—I shall be back in a month, anyway. I intend to settle down here again. But I should like to know her name. I know girls at the High School—but perhaps you can find out."

She scribbled an address on a stamped postcard, gave it to Mrs. Pugh, and walked quickly away in the direction of the railway station.

CHAPTER IX

CHRIS SOLVES A MYSTERY

"CHRIS, it's very decent of you. Can you really manage my little lot with your own?"

"Of course. Only six altogether, walking down the street. Nothing to twenty-two, all armed, and all resolute not to play a decent game." And the hockey captain thrust her hands into her pockets, looking competent.

"You're a darling." Sylvia, rather pale and weary, turned to her books. "I can work so much better in the morning," she added, with a little sigh. Scholarship examinations are no joke, and she was to try her first the following week.

"My time for a good hard game," said Chris cheerfully. "Who's going into town? Maude Semple—can't stand that pleasant and affable type—Di, and the snippet?"

"Yes. And—oh, Chris, Marie Macleod has some little game of her own. I don't know what it is, but she walks up Pond Road, past

the cemetery, and round by Meadow Lane by herself. She meets us by the Post Office."

"'Evings!" ejaculated Chris. "You told me about the cemetery stunt, but I didn't take in the facts entirely. Thought you walked up and down outside, looking at the view."

"With two of the Green Dorm? Chris, be intelligent."

"Suppose it's all right," said Chris doubtfully. "Unless the Hornet ever meets her on her ramblings. You don't spoil that child, do you, Sylvia?"

"*Spoil* her?" said Sylvia irritably. "I haven't spoken to her this term, as far as I can remember. I told Miss Lester—she understands things, and I thought it would be as well to have some authority in case the Hornet were inspired to put in a morning following us round, and were to discover Marie walking a few hundred yards alone. Miss Lester has her eye on Marie, you know. She says she does the most original work it has been her luck to strike. She quite saw the point of the child's wish to take her flowers minus a mob."

"Right-o," said Chris. "Good deep methods, yours, old thing. Don't know if I approve of stirring up dissension among the staff, however—that's what it might amount to. Now for a cosy morning with the chicks."

The "chicks" were collected with some difficulty. Marie, ready to start, was writing to Jacintha in the schoolroom.

"Will I have time to finish?" she asked, raising a flushed face as Chris summoned her. She was now nervously particular about her spelling, even for Jacintha, and composition occupied some time in consequence.

"Top speed, then," said Chris resignedly. "If you're not at the front door in ten minutes, off goes the expedition without you."

With that she withdrew, and Marie, having finished her letter, looked at it, her brows drawn together.

DEAREST JACINTHA,—I told you in my last letter I was lonely, but now I am lonelier than ever. I think it is the only unhappy thing in the world. I do not think I should mind any other sorrow.

Judith is dead, as you know, and I do not play with Brownie now. I do not think I wish Judith and Brownie, I only wish not to be lonely.

Miss Lester told us some punishments the other day when she taught us history. She described them well, and she made me feel cold and as if I had wee spikes in my arms and

behind my knees. She did not tell the worst, she said they were too horrible, and would make us miserable. She asked me if I felt ill, and she made me go and drink some water.

Now, Jacintha darling, I speak truly when I say that if only I could have one happy term, with Diana as my friend, and Sylvia thinking I was good, I would endure a cruel punishment. In the fairy tales princesses sometimes get a wish, and something lovely is given them, but they must pay for it in the end. I wish fairy tales were true. Someone generally helps a princess, and she does not die an unhappy death, but I would not be caring if no one helped me if I could have my happy wish first. I do not think to die would be so bad as being lonely, and wearying.

From your loving friend,
MARIE STEWART MACLEOD.

Was it right to own that she was miserable, even to Jacintha? Was it keeping a stiff upper lip?

"Mar — ie Mac — leod——!" Chris's voice, in which was a note of exasperation, rang through the hall. Marie sprang up and rushed to the door, where the others were waiting.

"It's clear she has another secret scheme,"

thought Chris, but she made no comment, and when they arrived at the post office she allowed Marie to go on alone as usual; but, while the others bought stamps and superintended the weighing of parcels, she stood on the top step watching for Marjorie Somerton, who would pass with the White Dorm contingent.

"I say, Marjorie," she said when the bored one arrived, "cast an eye on this little lot, will you? I want to catch up Marie Macleod."

"Little lot?" exclaimed Marjorie wearily. "Where *is* Marie Macleod?"

"That's what I think we ought to know. Sylvie's job, really. But I'm standing for Sylvie this morning, and like to do a thing thoroughly."

"Right," sighed Marjorie. "What are they to do, anyhow?"

Chris handed over the list of errands, and was gone before Marjorie, scanning it as if it were her death warrant, had time to ask questions.

Meanwhile Marie, glad to have obtained the opportunity for uncriticized action, went quickly along Pond Road. It was a clear blue morning, heralding one of those calm and beautiful days that sometimes come in the midst of March storms. The gardens were

bordered with early spring flowers, and there was a smell of grass and wet mould. The hedges past the cross-roads were showing faint green, and a blackbird sang in a budded sycamore tree. Marie, city-bred, unused to the gradual signs of the coming of spring, was excited and happy, and the desire for adventure, never sleeping very heavily, was aroused in her. As she could not go again to tend the little grave, she would have plenty of time on her hands. Why shouldn't she have a closer look at the sad "House with the Shut Eyes" —Jacintha's house?

Fortune favoured her. The green gate stood a little open. A few tools lay on the gravel, but there was no one to be seen, and the blinds were still drawn, the shutters closed, and the knocker and bell tarnished.

She slipped her letter into the wooden box, and insinuated herself through the gate, taking care not to push it any further open. Tiptoe, she crept down the side walk and into the part of the garden that lay at the back of the house. Her heart beating fast, her eyes wide, she looked about her.

Daisy buds showed in the shaggy grass, on which the morning hoar-frost was melting. A little stone nymph leaned watching the long stone jar she held, as if she expected to see

water pouring from it into a fountain bowl overgrown with ivy and moss. Rose trees, now a tangle of red, thorny stems, grew beyond the fountain, and unpruned espaliers straggled against the walls. It was lonely and sad, but Marie liked it, though she could not have said why.

Suddenly she heard the sound of whistling and the tramp of feet on the gravel. A man, carrying a straw bag of tools over his shoulder, came through into the back garden. He glanced at her in some astonishment, and took his pipe out of his mouth as if preparing for conversation, but she did not wait to be questioned. As if discovered in the perpetration of some crime, she gave him a quick, guilty look and fled—straight into the arms of Chris, who was waiting for her outside the green gate.

"Steady on!" advised the captain. "Why this desperate haste?"

"N-n-n-nothing," stammered Marie inconsequently.

"Come along, then," said Chris, with a curious glance. "It appears advisable to get a swift move on."

They turned, and for a few minutes walked in silence along Meadow Lane, the pleasantest way back to the town. Then Chris spoke.

"Now, Marie," she said, "what's your scheme? Why were you in that garden?"

"I don't know," replied Marie, simply and truthfully, for, when it came to the point, she didn't.

"Well, why did you post your letter in that box?"

"It's a l-l-letter to my g-g-greatest friend," Marie managed to say. The hedges and houses seemed to be rocking about her; she was terribly frightened.

"Why on earth should you post letters to your friend in the letter-box of an empty house?" demanded Chris. "Who *is* your friend?"

"You wouldn't know her," said Marie.

Chris was annoyed by the unconscious rebuff.

"I thought you hadn't any friends in Ledbrooke," she said. "I happen to know the owner of that house slightly. Her husband was a sort of cousin of Sylvia Leigh's."

A painful little hammer beat in Marie's forehead. How could she explain?

"She doesn't live there," she whispered.

"Where *does* she live?"

Marie desperately considered the Hon. Jacintha MacBain.

"She used to live at Balmoral Castle," she said.

Chris bit her lip. Either this child had the nerve to rag a prefect and the captain of the hockey club, or she was mad, utterly mad. The latter solution seemed the more likely. She must be repressed.

"In future you must post your letters at the post office or in a pillarbox," she said. "Quite clear as to that? Not one of your letters will be delivered from that place. They'll all be there still, if you have been in the habit of posting them there. And there'll be what you might call a fuss if they're discovered."

Marie started. Chris, pleased with the impression she had made, went on.

"It's illegal to interfere with other people's private property," she said impressively.

"But I haven't interfered," gasped Marie, her small face growing white with anxiety. "I haven't hurt anything."

"Well, what were you doing in that garden?" catechised Chris.

"I—I wished to see what it was like."

"What it was like? That's trespassing, of course. 'Trespassers will be prosecuted.' You know that, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what 'trespassing' and 'prosecuted' mean?"

"I'm not very sure."

"Well, I should find out. Did anyone see you there?"

"Y-y-yes, a gardener man."

Chris gave a low whistle. She was rather enjoying the situation.

"That's bad," she said.

Marie, half running to keep up with the captain's long, swinging strides, turned up her scared face.

"Will I be prosecuted?" she asked.

"Probably," said Chris. "It depends. Anyway, take my advice, and keep with the others on Saturdays. I wouldn't be seen in the vicinity of Pond Road or Meadow Lane again, if I were you. It'll all be up with you if you are. Hullo—there's our crowd!"

The Red Dorm took possession of its prefect, and Marjorie looked unutterable reproaches. Chris regarded her cheerfully.

"Keep calm," she advised in an undertone. "I've discovered something really interesting. I rather think our young friend here is troubled with a spider on the ceiling, as the French put it." And she shook her head, sorrowfully regarding the unconscious

Marie, who had shyly joined Diana and Maude. They were too much interested in their private conversation to pay any attention to her, but she did not care—the new fear dominated her.

Directly they reached school, she rushed to her shelf, took down the dictionary (which, though of variegated hues, was still legible) and, with shaking fingers, turned up the letter P.

"*Prosecute*—to pursue by law, to bring before a court."

She had thought so.

She must never venture near the "House with Shut Eyes" again. One more thing had gone—she had written her last letter to Jacintha.

CHAPTER X

MAUDE AND A MEDAL

AS the Easter term drew to its close, the chief topic in Ledbrooke High School was the drill competition. No gymnastic classes were held during the summer term, their place being taken by extra swimming and outdoor games. Two medals were awarded—one in the group of senior classes, counting from the Fourth upwards, one in the junior, which comprised the Second and Third. The First took no part in the competition.

During the morning of the great day Miss Penoyre, the gym mistress, inspected all the class drill and named the girls whom she considered eligible for the medal; in the afternoon the final test took place before an audience composed of outside visitors and schoolgirls.

The Green Dorm frothed with excitement on the evening before the competition. Even Marie, with the fear of punishment evoked by Chris weighing on her heart, felt something of the anticipation which was filling the others.

She did not know what the next day might have in store for her—whether she would be frightened and unable to climb or jump because her hands and knees would shake, or whether she would be happy, as she generally was in the gymnasium, but she realized that if she could forget the likelihood of being prosecuted, there was at least a chance of enjoyment.

"One of the Green Dorm *must* get it," said Kitty, sitting up in bed and hugging her knees. "It'll count ten marks for the Dorm shield and ten for the Form shield—a big lift."

Kitty, although she took little part in contributing them, was the great authority among the juniors on marks. She knew exactly how many each form and each dormitory had scored, and was certain as to the possible total for everyone.

"Diana will get it," said Maude.

Diana, brushing her hair, tried to look as if she thought it unlikely.

"Diana will be in for it, certain sure," said Lyn.

"I don't care who gets it, as long as it's one of us," announced Becky.

"*You* might be in for it," said Kitty. "And Marie Macleod, I believe."

Marie glowed, for Kitty spoke kindly, but the pleasure died down as she realized that there was a silence among the others, as if a possibility they did not care to contemplate had just occurred to them.

"I won't be in for it," she said timidly.

"I don't see why not," said Diana. "You are one of the best, and you can jump higher than anyone else."

"Oh, Diana! Except *you*," said Maude.

"Well, I hope you'll get it, after all your practice," said Kitty brighly.

Diana flushed.

"Practice?" she repeated.

"Haven't you and Maude practised jumping in the gym before prayers? Sorry—didn't know it was a private stunt." And Kitty, with the cheerful tactlessness of the most intimate friend, looked round the dormitory for sympathy.

"Neither did I," said Diana, annoyed. She hated people to think she wanted to get things, and she hated herself for feeling as she did about Marie—why had her voice suddenly sounded so unfriendly when she spoke to her? She hadn't meant it to—she had meant to say something decent, really. Why couldn't she?

"Everyone in bed?" Sylvia's voice

sounded at the door, and Diana vaulted over the rail and dived under the blankets.

"Diana Kyrle is going to win the medal to-morrow," said Maude.

Sylvia usually discouraged conversation, but to-night was a special occasion, and one might reasonably think there was no danger in venturing a remark.

"So I see," said Sylvia.

Diana's head emerged from the bedclothes, and she grinned cheerfully.

"Who else has a chance?" asked Sylvia, ready to switch off the light.

There was silence. Schoolgirl-like, they had named their favourite, and admitted no other.

"Good luck to the Green Dorm, anyway," and Sylvia clicked the dormitory into darkness.

But on her way out, moved by the old impulse of kindness towards Marie, she paused at the foot of her bed.

"*You* must get in for the afternoon show, Marie," she said in a low voice.

"Och, I don't think I will," said Marie shyly, finding that gratitude made speech difficult.

Sylvia hesitated a minute. Her conscience gave her a little stab. Was the child happy?

Had the friendship with the others which had manifested itself last term come to nothing? Her annoyance with Marie over the "Thunder. Enter 1 Lunatic" affair had been temporary, but she had been very busy, too busy to think of anything beyond Greek and Latin. What did Chris's story about the visits to Mrs. Blair's house mean? The captain's "Well, whatever she went for, she's too scared to go again, so that settles it," did not settle it for Sylvia, who had herself been an imaginative child, and guessed that Marie had been prompted by some romantic motive, probably induced by loneliness, and certainly harmless.

"I'll find out as soon as the first exam is over," she decided, and softly went out of the dormitory. But Marie realized that she had hesitated, could feel the friendliness of her, and lay quiet and happy, making resolutions for the next day. Sylvia, *Sylvia* thought that she might be chosen for the final competition; Sylvia would perhaps be glad if she were to win the medal. The latter seemed an unlikely honour, but she would try.

"Did you hear that?" whispered Maude, whose cubicle was next Diana's.

Diana did not answer, and Maude felt she had made a mistake.

"Oh, I shan't," said Diana resignedly. "You must, you must."

"Oh, I shan't," said Diana resignedly. "I'm down on my luck."

"For the honour of the Dorm——" Kitty put in drowsily.

"Silence, girls!" said Becky, in her best Miss Hornsby voice. "This is the hour for sleep."

CHAPTER XI

THE JUMPING COMPETITION

TO her relief, Marie found that she enjoyed the competition. It was a clear blue morning; the windows of the gymnasium stood wide open, and the daffodils that filled the blue bowls on the sills seemed to have caught the sunlight in their golden coronas. Their freshness and gaiety stirred happiness in her sad little frightened heart, and the swing of the slim figures of the eager girls, their excitement and their endeavour to excel themselves, moved her like music. With set face and resolute will, she went through the marching and free exercises, the dancing and apparatus work, with the rest of her class. She did not know whether she did well or badly; she only felt that things happened so that she liked them.

It was surprise as well as pleasure that sent the blood to her cheeks when Miss Dangerfield, taking from Miss Penoyre the list of girls chosen for the afternoon competition for

the junior medal, read: "Olive Estridge, Diana Kyrle, Marie Macleod, Lilian Thursby, Nancy White."

"Maude Semple to help with the apparatus," added Miss Penoyre, and Marie felt suddenly dashed. Maude would be there—hauling out the horse and spring-board, arranging the posts and rope and mat. She dreaded the mocking scrutiny of those light, narrow eyes; she feared that she would not do her best. If only Kitty were there too; Kitty, who had given her a chocolate mouse and said she was utterly mad. That would make things easier.

"So you're in, snippet?" said Chris, stopping for a moment with Sylvia as they passed Marie in the dinner hour. She was standing alone; the others of the Lower Third were crowded round Diana, discussing chances, and expressing amazement as to Miss Penoyre's lack of discernment in choosing Olive Estridge from the Middle Third, and Lilian Thursby from the Second.

Marie looked up, surprised. Had Chris forgotten that she was a law-breaker who was liable to prosecution, for whom a policeman might call at the school at any time? Evidently. Chris was smiling and friendly; the sunlight caught the Upper School medal

for the year before last, pinned on to her tunic.

"You must win, Marie," said Sylvia, softly. Sylvia wore last year's medal.

"Oh, I shan't," said Marie, who knew that this was the right thing to say. And she gave Sylvia a grateful eloquent look. It was wonderful that the head girl should speak to her so kindly two days running, when she had been aloof and indifferent for so long.

"I'm sorry for that child," said Sylvia, as she and Chris walked on. "She seems awfully lonely, and I can't think why. There's something fascinating about her—she's like a little elf."

"She'll be all right next year," said Chris comfortably.

"A year's a long time to a child," said Sylvia. "I wish Diana Kyrle had taken it into her head to be friendly with her instead of with Maude Semple. Maude isn't a bit Diana's sort."

Diana was half conscious of the same opinion as, that afternoon, she waited with the others for the Junior Competition to begin. She wished Maude wouldn't express her opinion as to who would win so often and so loudly when the others were present. It made her feel foolish and angry, and she

looked towards Kitty, who had insinuated herself into the gym cloak-room for some kind of comfort, but Kitty stared moodily at Maude and said nothing.

Marie, sitting on the floor hugging her knees, was silent too, while the other Second and Third Form girls chattered in friendly excitement.

Diana was irritated. How was it that things had gone so badly with her lately? Her place at the top of the form was threatened; she might not gain the gym medal she had only just missed last year; Sylvia had not wished her luck, had not even spoken to her; and now her special friend Kitty seemed to be vaguely disapproving of her. Things were unfair. She looked quickly at Marie—Marie, who might be top of the Lower Third and wear the gym medal on her tunic, Marie, who had been talking to Sylvia in the dinner hour. Marie seemed unhappy and anxious—but she often put on that pathetic expression—Maude declared that she knew it went down with the mistresses and the elder girls.

There was a sound of footsteps, and Marjorie Somerton opened the door.

"They're ready for you," she said.

"Who has won the senior medal?" whispered Kitty.

"Shan't know till to-morrow. Look slippy."

The chosen five formed into line and marched to the entrance of the gymnasium, where Miss Penoyre awaited them. On the platform sat Miss Dangerfield, with a few school patrons and honoured guests; the benches round the walls were crowded with girls and visitors; by the door were Chris and Sylvia, talking to a fair-haired lady wearing a long black veil.

"Mrs. Blair, is that the child you mean?" asked Sylvia, indicating Marie, who, being the smallest of the competitors, marched first. "That's Marie Macleod."

"That's the little girl," said Mrs. Blair, leaning forward eagerly. "Of course. I should have been *quite* sure. She is so obviously a Macleod. Poor wee lassie!"

Chris and Sylvia exchanged glances.

"Does she know you?" asked Sylvia. "Or did she write to you because she knew her father knew you?"

Mrs. Blair shook her head.

"It's a mystery," she said. "She certainly doesn't know me, and it's unlikely that her father would know my address. If he had he would have wanted me to see that she was not lonely, and surely he would have written

to me. And she has been lonely—dreadfully lonely."

She looked at the bundle of letters she held in her hand, stained and mildewed, bound together with a piece of rose-coloured ribbon.

"Poor wee lassie," she said, and her voice was very low and tender. "The Honourable Jacintha MacBain! What had she got in her mind—why my right and lawful 'Jacintha' tacked on to 'Honourable' and 'MacBain'?"

Chris shook her head. Fragments of her dialogue with Marie outside Mrs. Blair's house—the House with Shut Eyes—were coming into her mind. Marie had said her friend used to live at Balmoral Castle; she had been scared to death at Chris's discovery that she had posted letters in the green wooden box; her trembling "Will I be prosecuted?" was extraordinary, considering that her father and the owner of the house had been acquainted.

"That snippet is beyond me," she thought.

"I'll bring her round to you after the show is over," said Sylvia, "and then you can talk."

"I must be careful with her," said Mrs.

Blair. "She's dreadfully shy—she ran away from me once when I asked her name."

"She is frightened at first," said Sylvia. "But afterwards she is rather a darling."

Sylvia was bewildered too. She was wondering what those letters were about, and why Marie had made so great a mystery of leaving them at Mrs. Blair's house.

"Yes," said Mrs. Blair softly. "She is —rather a darling. But I suppose we are missing a great deal."

Applause greeted the close of the marching and free exercises test, and Mrs. Blair moved sideways a little that she might see Marie as she stood at attention at the ribstalls. Miss Penoyre had jumped up on to the platform and was consulting Miss Dangerfield, who glanced at the notebook the gym mistress showed her, looking first at Diana, then at Marie.

"The travelling and jumping will probably help to decide things?" she said.

Miss Penoyre sprang down from the platform and snapped out a sharp command. The audience watched with tense interest, naming their favourites. Each of the five girls, with eyes shining and cheeks flushed with excitement, strained every nerve to do

well, but it was obvious to all but the least discerning of the spectators that the medal lay between two of them.

"It'll be Diana Kyrle or Marie Macleod, don't you think?" said Chris to Mrs. Blair. "I didn't know Marie was so smart. She's such a snippet of a thing."

"Diana's good," and Sylvia looked approvingly at the strong light little figure, with its shining hair and triumphant movements, which made one think that it would not be surprising if Diana were suddenly to begin to fly.

"She's beautiful to see," and Mrs. Blair's eyes went from her to Marie with a curious expression of tenderness and understanding, as if she were watching her own child.

Miss Penoyre called "Rest!" and nodded to Maude to bring out the stands, rope and mat.

"Not the spring-board," she said. "We'll see what you can do without any help."

Maude arranged the apparatus with her usual speed and dexterity, and stood aside, ready to pick up and readjust the rope if necessary. Miss Penoyre motioned her a little farther away, feeling the chosen girls

could do better with a sense of space about them.

Up to three feet eight they all did well, running, leaping, and landing with a resolution and lightness beautiful to behold. Olive and Nancy failed to clear three feet ten, and dropped out. Lilian Thursby fell over the rope and hopped a few inches with one end of it firmly twisted round her ankle, while the Second made futile attempts to restrain their mingled sympathy and amusement, for Lilian always made this particular exit from the scene of action, and didn't mind being teased about it. As most people had foreseen, Diana and Marie were left to fight it out between them.

"Good for the Green Dorm, Sylvia," said Chris, and Sylvia smiled and nodded, looking from Mrs. Blair's intent face to the two little figures standing ready for the final ordeal. Marie was now very pale; Diana's face was so set and resolute that she seemed older, and, to the friendly eyes of Kitty and company, almost like a stranger.

"Three eleven: Diana Kyrle," called Miss Penoyre, and Diana, lips compressed, paused for a moment, and then came swiftly and easily to the rope and cleared it, landing

lightly, without a hint of a sideways turn. The girls broke into clapping, which at once ceased at Miss Penoyre's: "Three eleven: Marie Macleod."

Marie approached with a desperate little run, not so beautiful as Diana's leaping steps, and cleared the rope. Again there was applause, though it did not come with such spontaneity as that which had rewarded Diana.

"Four feet: Diana Kyrle."

"They're good, these infants," said Chris, astonished. "Why, the senior high jump without the spring-board was only four five. Jumping their own height, they are, like——" she met Sylvia's warning glance—"like *insects*."

Applause once more. Diana was over, but the hem of her tunic had just touched the rope, and Miss Penoyre gave a warning "Take care!"

"Four feet: Marie Macleod."

Without brushing the rope, Marie achieved the height. This time there was a burst of genuine applause. Maude bit her lip.

"Two inches higher this time," ordered Miss Penoyre. "Four two—Diana."

Diana glanced at the rope, which now

seemed a great distance from the ground, approached, and cleared it, but this time her tunic caught, and brought it down. A little, quickly suppressed gasp of disappointment came from her friends.

"Another try, Diana, as it was only your tunic," called Miss Penoyre. "But the next is your last."

Diana, without smiling or seeming anxious, walked back to her place, while Maude, with a quick glance at the gym mistress, fixed the rope on the stands.

"Four, two: Marie Macleod."

The Lower Third held their breaths, craning to see the little thin girl, who stood alone, her grave eyes taking the measure of the height she must clear. Their Diana might be beaten in the class-room—was she to be beaten in the gymnasium too? There was neither enthusiasm nor admiration, only strained anxiety in their faces.

Fortunately, Marie was unconscious of this. For the time being she was lost in the joy and rigour of the game. She had forgotten Diana, and Maude's unfriendly looks, and her desire to shine before Sylvia. She had forgotten all her loneliness, and fear of prosecution which had weighed on her since that talk with Chris. There was nothing in

her world but a big height to be jumped, and she wanted above everything to feel herself doing it, to find herself safe on the mat beyond, with a taut and motionless rope behind her.

She stood for a few seconds longer than usual before making the approach. Then the odd little scuffling run—then she jumped with a tremendous effort, caught her foot in the rope, pulled it from the hooks, and fell in a twisted heap on the mat.

There was a subdued murmur of sympathy, but the Lower Third looked at one another in exultation. That meant a sure victory for Diana, for no one, after bringing the rope down, and falling prone, could hope for another try.

"Four two again: Diana Kyrle," announced Miss Penoyre.

Maude seized the rope and quickly placed it at the right height. Marie rose to her feet and staggered, nearly falling.

"Hurt, Marie?" asked Miss Penoyre.

"No, thank you." And with a brave little smile Marie recovered her balance and hobbled down the gym.

"Diana!" called Miss Penoyre.

Then two queer things happened. Sylvia saw one of them; Chris saw the other.

Marie came limping towards the door, as white as paper, her mouth twitching with pain, one thought in her mind—the thought that she must get out—get away somewhere where this horrible sharp thrusting in her foot wouldn't matter, where she might fall on the ground and moan, and even cry, without spoiling the competition, without being watched by visitors, by girls, by a head mistress, by patrons and donors. As she neared the exit, Mrs. Blair sprang to her feet.

"She's hurt," she said to Sylvia, not loudly, but loudly enough for Marie to hear.

Marie glanced up. There stood the lady who had seen her at the baby's grave, and in her hand was a bundle of letters—familiar with their square envelopes, with the round black handwriting of their addresses. . . . Jacintha's letters. . . . "Do you know what prosecuted means?" Something huge and tight leapt up in Marie's throat, and wedged and swelled there. . . . The pain ran like hot wires through her ankle. . . . The noise of a great engine throbbed and thundered very near, and then her ears seemed to get dreadfully cold. Without the smallest cry she fell, crumpled and tiny, at Mrs. Blair's feet.

Sylvia grasped the situation at once. She jumped up from her place, lifted Marie in her arms, and staggered with her out of the gym. The child had evidently hurt herself, perhaps badly, and had fainted with the pain, and the great thing was to avoid fuss, which would spoil the competition. The head girl and the "snippet" were at one on that point.

Mrs. Blair followed Sylvia, and gently closed the door of the gymnasium behind her.

Meanwhile Chris, who had leaned forward as Marie passed her, saw the other thing, a thing which amazed her, though her amazement was as nothing compared with the wave of emotion that surged in the breasts of Form Lower Three.

In obedience to Miss Penoyre's command Diana sprang forward with her beautiful free light movement. A few inches from the rope she stopped dead, "stuttered on her feet," as Kitty, indignantly describing the scene afterwards, put it, and, with an absurd and helpless movement, leaped about twelve inches from the ground, staggering against the rope—in fact, she, Diana, who had never been known to funk any achievement by land or water, deliberately and obstinately, as it seemed, funked this jump.

For the moment the Lower Third was stupefied, utterly dumb.

"That's enough, Diana," said Miss Penoyre. "Clear away, Maude. In line —fall *in*."

And the four remaining competitors marched off to the accompaniment of a great deal of clapping, and the audience sang "God Save the King."

CHAPTER XII

CLEARING THE MYSTERY

"I'LL come and see her again in a few days," said Mrs. Blair, getting up from the chair of honour in Sylvia's little room —the chair where Marie had been comforted and promised the head girl's stockings at the beginning of a session which seemed to have begun a long time ago. "She won't be able to run away from me this time, the poor wee girl."

Sylvia smiled, rather wanly. And when Mrs. Blair had gone, and she returned to her room, she pushed her books to the corner of the table, and, resting her head on her hands, thought and thought.

She wished that the snippet had not been so horribly lonely. Mrs. Blair had shown her some of the letters to "Jacintha"—not all—and phrases had stuck in her memory. That first evening of the present term—Marie alone, after all her joyful surmisings, alone, after holidays spent alone in school. It was the "pretend" happiness of that

letter, honestly contradicted in a later one, that Sylvia remembered. Then—"I do not think to die would be so bad as being lonely, and wearying. . . ." Sylvia knew all about little girls who like to picture their own funerals. She knew that many of them had languished for "darling Sylvia Leigh." But this was different—this was a genuine cry of the heart.

"Darling Sylvia Leigh" had helped the alien once or twice. She had lent her stockings, and she had taught her how to do the movements for swimming, and she had let her deliver her letters and tend her little grave unmolested. But there was all the rest of the time "being lonely and wearying."

Mrs. Blair had been lonely, too. Sylvia's young face grew grave as she remembered what she knew of the life of the tall lady in black. Sylvia's mother had said she was sorry for her when she married handsome Captain Kenneth Blair, though Sylvia's mother was one of the clan. Then he had died gallantly, "killed in action," and Sylvia's father had quoted something that he was pleased with her for recognizing as a phrase from *Macbeth*, to the effect that nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it. Sylvia could not understand

her father and mother, who generally liked people so much, when they talked about Captain Blair.

Then she had heard that Mrs. Blair's little baby had died, and that she had grieved most terribly, shutting herself up in her house at Ledbrooke, refusing to see her friends, indifferent to life, which had treated her so cruelly. At last she had gone away, and the house had been closed for over a year. The House with Shut Eyes, Marie had called it, addressing the envelopes she had posted there.

How strange it was that Marie should have sent those letters to Mrs. Blair! It seemed impossible that she should know of her—though her father had danced with her when they were boy and girl together. But she had got the name, Mrs. Blair's odd name, "Jacintha." And she had taken care of that neglected little grave, Mrs. Blair's baby's grave. It was very queer—but Sylvia had always felt that Marie was a queer child, and had liked her because of it.

She mustn't be lonely again.

There was a knock at the door—a furtive, uncertain, unwilling kind of knock.

"Oh, come in," said Sylvia wearily. She was not in the mood for visitors.

The door opened just far enough to admit the sleek fair head of Kitty Keyes.

"Hullo, Kitty. What's the trouble?" and Sylvia half rose, anticipating a turmoil in the Green Dorm and a message from Miss Hornsby.

"Oh, there's no one in the Dorm," said Kitty reassuringly. "But I want to tell you something, Sylvia, if you can be bothered. I thought Diana ought to come, as she's top of the form, but she says it would be awkward in the circs, and that the reversed top girl is next best for a matter of this kind."

Sylvia looked quickly at Kitty, whose lively face was unwontedly solemn. Her rule was such that her subjects did not often bother her with trifles, and she realized that the little clique of Lower Thirders, for whom she was particularly responsible, must really be perplexed when one of them was deputed to seek her out.

"Right," she said. "Sit down, and fire away."

Kitty seated herself on the extreme edge of the big chair, stared at the photograph of Sylvia's brother on the mantelpiece, twisted her hair-ribbon with such violence that it came off, and became speechless.

"Well," said Sylvia, who was prepared for these signs, "how's Marie? Have you seen her?"

"Oh, Sylvia, we don't really know, for Matron won't let us in to see her. But the doctor has been and bound up her foot, and she's in bed in the Grey Room. It didn't bleed, Matron says, but she thinks it may be really bad."

Kitty's eyes dilated with the interest of the theme.

"If it's a sprain it'll be painful, but not serious," said Sylvia. "I'm sorry for Marie; she'll be lonely, and it's hard luck that she should be ill just as term exams are coming on, when she had a chance of being top."

"Yes. Diana and I have been discussing that, but we're going to take up revision lists at the end of every morning, and go over special things—at least, Di is. I suppose I shan't be much good," and Kitty sighed. "Anyway, what I think should be done is probably what should be avoided, and it's always a help to be a danger signal or an awful warning, isn't it?"

"Most useful, I should think," agreed Sylvia. "So she'll be allowed to do her exams in the Grey Room?"

"Di thinks she will. Lyn Somerton did

once, you know, when she was getting over a mild attack of influenza. It's awfully funny that people who are gasping to do exams are so often ill at the critical moment. Now, I don't particularly care for them, and I'd be surprised if anything ever happened to me." And Kitty looked depressed.

"Anyway," said Sylvia, "I'm glad you're all being so decent to Marie. She won't find resting that foot half bad, in the circumstances."

"Oh, Sylvia, that's what I've come about," burst out Kitty. "We haven't been decent to Marie a bit. We ragged her like anything at first, because she was such a baby, or we thought she was, and then we just didn't bother about her one way or the other."

"I see," said Sylvia. "But you can make up for it now."

"Yes. But what's worrying Diana is something else—something about Maude Semple."

Sylvia's eyebrows went up.

"In that case, hadn't I better see Maude herself?"

"Oh, Sylvia, I'm not going to tell tales or be a sneak, or anything of that sort. It's only that we've got to do something and we

don't know what would be best. You know Maude was putting back the rope as it fell down?"

"Yes." Sylvia's tone was suddenly sharp, and her eyes very serious.

"Well. Di's tunic caught and dragged it off at four two, and Maude had to put it back for Marie."

"Yes?"

"Well, she put it at four four. At least, Di thinks she did. Di thought so at the time. That's why she wouldn't take her own jump—you saw how queer it was, the way Di funked her jump."

"You mean," said Sylvia, "that Marie was given a jump two inches higher than that which Diana attempted?"

"Yes. You see, Maude was tremendously keen that Diana should win the medal—we all were, and we showed it, rather. We were rather rotten about it."

Sylvia nodded.

"Kitty, are you sure of your facts?" she asked.

"Well, I thought the rope looked higher than it should be, and then Di was so sure when she saw her own jump in comparison that she wouldn't try it."

"Of course, Maude may have made a

mistake. Even if she did, it's pretty bad. People who are trusted with that kind of job are expected to carry it out properly."

"I know. That's our difficulty. Di is so frightfully sick about it all, Sylvia. She says it's really her fault—that she let Maude see how keen she was, and she was horrid to Marie, and Maude meant to do her a good turn. And yet she says Miss Penoyre ought to know to-night, for it may make a difference to the judging. You see, Marie might have cleared four two."

"Diana didn't know what Maude meant to do?" There was fear in Sylvia's quick question.

"Oh, Sylvia!"

Sylvia felt almost ashamed. She ought to have been certain of that—whatever Diana might say or be or do, she had the sporting spirit, and she would never want to take a thing she hadn't won. That had been obvious a hundred times to those who worked and played with her.

"I think," she said, "that Maude had better tell Miss Penoyre that she fixed the rope at the wrong height for Marie. Have you said anything to her about it?"

"To Maude? Diana's talking to her now. But supposing she says she didn't?"

Sylvia shrugged.

"You can only believe it."

"But Di says Marie ought to have the medal."

"Di hasn't won it yet—at least, we don't know that she has. Let's find Maude." And Sylvia got up, and flung open the door.

It was not a difficult matter. There stood Maude and Diana, both about to enter Sylvia's study.

"Oh, Sylvia," Maude began, "Diana thought I should come and tell you that I made a mistake in adjusting the rope for Marie Macleod that time. I'm very sorry about it—it was really frightfully careless of me."

Something in Sylvia's face made the glib words die away on her tongue.

"*Careless!*" said the head girl. "I should think so. Imagine making a mistake like that, when Miss Penoyre had given you so responsible a position! And you see the result. Probably Marie wouldn't have fallen if she had tried the height Diana did. You must feel thoroughly sick about it."

"I do rather," faltered Maude. Her self-possession was deserting her; she had not expected Sylvia to treat her like this,

to look at her with such scornful eyes, and speak in so hard and angry a voice. And Diana—Diana, whom she had wished to benefit, for whom she had risked so much! What right had Diana to attack her, to ask her if she *knew* she had fixed the rope at four four for Marie? She had not realized the line Diana meant to take, and, hoping for approbation, she had not denied what she had done. Her hurried asseveration that the whole thing was a mistake, that she had seen it only when it was too late for her to rectify it, had not met with the success it might have had if she had made it at first, before Diana's anger blazed out. Now she felt indignant, ill-treated. She suddenly faced round upon Diana.

"I think *you* might stand up for me!" she said. "It isn't very sporting of you to leave me to bear it all!"

There was a moment's silence. Then Sylvia spoke.

"Hadn't you better go into my room, Maude?" she said in a level voice, quite empty of anger. "And Kitty—and Diana. I think this should be settled now, once and for all."

The three Lower Third girls entered Sylvia's study, and she sat down on her

table, facing them. Diana's cheeks were oddly flushed, in bright spots of colour, and her hair was literally on end.

"Diana," said Sylvia, "*ought* you to stand by Maude? What does she mean?"

"I don't know," said Diana, her blue eyes meeting Sylvia's. "But I do know that I've been a jealous beast about Marie Macleod. I've been jealous of her for heaps of things. I'm not now. I don't know why I was. I believe I always liked her, inside."

"It's a pity you didn't think of that before," sneered Maude. "It would have made things a lot easier for me."

"What do you mean?" flashed Diana.

"Didn't you ask me to heighten the rope a couple of inches for Marie, just at the end, if she were jumping as well as you? I think you might own up to that, anyway."

Diana gasped. Unable to say a word, she could only look imploringly at Sylvia. But Sylvia pretended not to see her beseeching eyes.

"So Diana asked you to do this, Maude?" she said. "And I suppose you said it was a mistake, in order to shield her?"

"I didn't want to give her away," said Maude, her voice becoming less agitated as she realized the impartiality of Sylvia's. "It didn't seem fair."

"Quite a sound motive," said Sylvia. "And when did Diana suggest this idea to you?"

"Just before the competition—the night before, when we were in bed. You had switched off the light, and you stopped to say good night to Marie Macleod, and how you hoped she'd win the medal"—Sylvia's eyes snapped, but she did not interrupt—"and Diana was frightfully annoyed. She has just said herself that she was always jealous of Marie."

"Oh," said Sylvia, "just after I had switched off the light. Kitty, did you hear Diana and Maude talking that night?"

"Yes, I did," burst out Kitty. "And Maude asked Diana if she'd heard what you said to Marie, and Diana didn't say anything, and Maude said she hoped Diana would win, and she, Diana, I mean, said she wouldn't—that is, Diana wouldn't, and Becky said 'Silence' in the Hornet's voice because she, Becky, I mean, wanted to go to sleep. And she, Diana, you know, went to sleep at once, because I asked her some-

thing about the Latin exercise five minutes afterwards, and she didn't answer—and I never heard such absolute rot in my life."

"Your bed is on the other side of Diana's, isn't it?" asked Sylvia.

"Yes, and it's shoved fairly close, to make conversation easier—I mean, there are things occasionally to be said after lights are out—we don't make a row."

Sylvia looked at Maude.

"Perhaps Diana didn't say it then," said Maude. "Perhaps it was at some other time."

Sylvia's lip curled ever so slightly, but she was still the judge, impartial, weighing evidence.

"Well, Diana?" she said. "*Did* you make this suggestion?"

"No," said Diana. And said nothing else.

"Diana and Kitty, you might clear out," said Sylvia. "Maude, I think you had better stay a few minutes."

The two departed, Kitty at boiling point, Diana still with the queer little flushes under her eyes. Sylvia turned to Maude.

"Sit down," she said curtly. "I want to tell you one or two things—mind, they're

just things I've noticed. To begin with, I remember a row between you and Marie Macleod some time ago, at the beginning of the session. I think she made your nose bleed? You had been ragging her, the crowd of you—but it was you she went for. I suppose there was some reason for that? Also, on the same occasion, Diana, Becky, Lyn, and Kitty owned up—you said nothing. That was queer, when the chief quarrel seemed to be between you and her——"

"She hurt me dreadfully," muttered Maude.

"And you didn't hurt her first? Well, we'll leave that. But you and Marie have never been friendly, have you?"

"No wonder."

"Exactly. Do you remember that night when Miss Hornsby found Marie pretending to be a lunatic in the Green Dorm? I heard her talking to you on the stairs, asking why you had left the light on in the Dorm. Then Marie was discovered, and there was the big row. Do you know, I've always thought it most tremendously queer that Marie should get herself up in that rig-out and practise the extraordinary contortions she thought the part demanded with the door wide open?"

Sylvia leaned back on the table, swinging one foot, looking interrogatively at Maude, who turned crimson.

"I don't see how you can say that has anything to do with me," she said.

"I can't," returned Sylvia coolly. "My guess is simply founded on circumstantial evidence. I can't say anything about the matter and prove it's true, and for that reason I never *have* said anything about it."

"I don't know why you're talking like this," cried Maude. "You seem to hate me and to want me to be in trouble." And her lip quivered.

"Nonsense," said Sylvia, and her voice became quite gentle. "I don't hate you, and I want to get you out of trouble, but I also want to be fair to Diana and to Marie Macleod. Marie has hurt herself—I don't know how badly—and Diana has been accused of doing the meanest thing I imagine a girl in this school ever has done."

Maude was silent. She was frightened in a way she had never guessed possible. Her heart beat wildly; the furniture in the room seemed to crowd round and shut her in; she could not escape the merciless scrutiny of those grey eyes that looked and

looked at her as if they saw the very back of her soul. And all the time she was conscious of things that did not matter at all—Sylvia's bright blue prefect's tie, a bit of worn leather on her writing-table, a tiny darn, done with meticulous care, on the instep of her stocking.

"You tell me," went on Sylvia, "that Diana asked you to give Marie an extra inch or two when it came to the last try. You tell me that she asked you at a certain time, and then you contradict yourself. Also you have overlooked the fact that neither you nor Diana *knew* that you would be chosen by Miss Penoyre or Miss Dangerfield—I don't know who did the choosing—to look after the apparatus. You did not know till about one o'clock this afternoon."

Maude tried to speak, but failed.

"Well?" said Sylvia. "Anything else to say?"

"No," said Maude sulkily. "It seems"—her voice quivered—"that you are all against me. I don't know why, I'm sure. Diana was my chum, and I wanted her to win. She was so keen on getting the medal. It doesn't matter what becomes of me. Father will let me leave at the end of this term if I want to. He would l-like m-me

to go to s-s-school in London." And, taking out a handkerchief, Maude began to cry.

"Look here," said Sylvia, "don't talk rot about everyone being against you. You've had a decent enough time since you came here—it's Marie who has suffered—oh, not only through you, I dare say. You just go straight to Miss Penoyre and tell her what you did this afternoon."

"Are—are you c-coming with me?" sobbed Maude.

"No," said Sylvia. "Tell her what you like, as long as you make it clear that Marie didn't get a fair chance that last time. But, Maude"—and her voice became low and rather embarrassed—"if I were you, I should be decent about it and own up. You'll feel wretched if you don't. I dare say you'll feel wretched if you do, but when you've done a rotten thing there's some satisfaction in facing the music."

Maude dabbed her eyes and looked doubtfully at Sylvia. For the first time, something of the head girl's spirit made its way into her mean little soul, and widened and lighted it.

"Very well, I'll go to her," she said. "I'm leaving, anyway."

"I shouldn't," said Sylvia. "I'd stick it out. You can stick anything out if you make up your mind to it. But that's not the point just now. Cut off to Miss Penoyre and get it over, and the rest won't be so bad."

And Kitty, hanging over the banisters to watch events, saw Maude steal from Sylvia's room, creep down the stairs, and tap at Miss Penoyre's door.

"Cheers!" she thought. "Down with the villain of the piece." And she entered the Green Dorm in triumph to communicate the joyful news to Diana.

But the curtains of Diana's cubicle were drawn, and Kitty, gingerly lifting one, saw her friend lying on the bed, her face hidden in her hands.

"*Diana!*" she thought to herself, in amazement and dismay. "I didn't know that *Diana* could cry. And what *is* there for her to cry about, anyway?"

CHAPTER XIII

DIANA VISITS MARIE

TO Diana it seemed that there was a good deal to cry about.

As Sylvia said, there is some sort of satisfaction, when one has botched things badly, in facing the music, but the hardest kind to face is that which shrills and blares from one's own soul. Diana was deeply and bitterly ashamed of her jealousy of Marie. She realized that she had felt inclined to be friendly with her after the first inevitable hostilities, and that, if it had Green Dorm set—Kotty liked her, and Becky when Sylvia showed the same inclination, Marie might have been admitted to the Green Dorm set—Kitty liked her, and Becky and Lyn were ready to do so. To be sure, she had "told" about the ragging episode --but *had* she? Maude had said so.

Diana felt the blood leap into her cheeks at the remembrance of what else Maude had said, an hour or two ago, in Sylvia's room.

Marie probably hadn't meant to betray the secret of the midnight theatricals. She certainly hadn't deserved the loneliness she must have suffered, and Diana gave a wretched little groan as she thought of how she had hated to see her doing well at school and in the gym, and of how she had found it impossible to be "decent" to her, to make her voice sound friendly even when she said a friendly thing. She had slipped into an intimacy with Maude because Maude flattered her and hated Marie—with what result!

She tormented herself to discover why Maude should have believed she would be glad to defeat Marie in such a way—she, Diana, who, if any dispute arose about a game, would have it settled to her own disadvantage rather than that there should be a shadow of doubt as to her winning the thing properly. She wriggled at the thought of what the boys, and her grown-up sister, would say if they heard the story.

"I *have* been a bounder," she told herself mercilessly, clenching her hands till her finger-nails hurt her palms.

One thing—she must be decent to Marie. She wondered if Marie were very bad, if it would hurt her to see people. Always impulsive, she wanted to rush straight off

and say she was sorry and ask for forgiveness. But Matron would probably be there, and Matron wouldn't let her in.

The supper bell clanged through the house. Eight o'clock! What a tremendous lot had happened between half-past five and eight! Did important things, which made people so absolutely miserable, always take so short a time?

She got up slowly, feeling stiff and headachey. She washed her face, and brushed her rumpled curls. The others would know she had been crying—let them! She didn't care.

As she crept out of the Green Dorm and softly shut the door she saw Matron's grey linen dress—she was going down to supper. Marie could be left, then—she would be alone.

Tiptoe, Diana ran along to the little room at the end of the corridor, which was kept for anyone on the sick list. The door stood ajar—she pushed it further open, and hesitated.

There, in the nearer of the two small beds, lay Marie, her cheek rested on her hand, her eyes looking straight before her, with that dreamy and yet eager expression of which Diana had often been conscious in

the Green Dorm—as if, though sad, she was expecting every moment that something might suddenly make her happy.

At the sight of her Diana became conscious of overwhelming shyness. She no longer knew how to say she was sorry, how to voice the desire to be friends which possessed her. And she remembered that Marie would know nothing yet of the Maude Semple business—that no one knew except Kitty and Sylvia—that Sylvia might even believe Maude's accusation. . . . She *couldn't*. Her quick look when she said—"Diana and Kitty, you might clear out," had said she couldn't. That would be all right.

She must just go ahead, and trust that the thing which was bound to happen would be the right one.

She went softly in and stood by Marie's bed. Marie looked up. Her little face, which had been pale, suddenly flushed with pleasure, and joy danced in her eyes.

"Hullo!" said Diana.

"Hullo!" responded Marie.

"I say—I'm very sorry about your foot. Does it hurt much?"

"Not much," said Marie valiantly.

"It was topping of you to get out without making a fuss. The Danger Signal

would have fairly bust with excitement if anyone had been hurt in public. All the visitors would have thought it part of the system."

"She's been up seeing me," said Marie.

"Who? Miss *Dang—er—field?*"

Marie nodded.

"I *say!* Did it make you feel worse?"

"I felt rather daft. Miss Penoyre was with her." And Marie gave a delighted little giggle at the symptoms of total collapse manifested by Diana.

"Imagine the Danger Signal seeing anyone in bed! It doesn't seem the right thing, does it?"

Marie said it didn't.

There was a sound of footsteps in the lower corridor.

"I'll clear," said Diana in alarm. "This is no place for me. Good night, Marie. I'll come and see you to-morrow."

And, taking Marie's small claw of a hand in hers, she gave it a friendly squeeze and hurried away.

Marie could say nothing, but her eyes followed Diana's quickly retreating figure to the door. The pain in her ankle was forgotten; her heart, so long empty of happiness, was brimming over.

"You mustn't be so glad, you mustn't," she told herself. "It'll be different to-morrow—it'll turn out to be just pretend. It can't be true that that was Diana come to see me—it can't, it can't. Happy things don't happen."

But they do sometimes, and this was one of them.

CHAPTER XIV

REAL FRIENDS FOR MARIE

MARIE had more visitors the next day. First was Sylvia, who came up directly after breakfast, before crossing from the boarding-house to the school building. Quickly, without any sort of comment, the head girl told her of what Maude had done.

"She owned up to Miss Penoyre," she concluded. "And Miss Penoyre said the award had been made before the jumping was over. The fact that you failed at that particular height made no difference."

Marie lay looking at Sylvia. Her eyes were very thoughtful.

"If I hadn't hurt my ankle Diana wouldn't have come to talk to me," she said. "Neither would you. It is lucky really."

"Expensive luck," said Sylvia. "*I* should have come in any case, Marie, because I have a message for you from Mrs. Blair —the lady to whom you wrote all those letters."

Marie flushed and her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, Sylvia, I didn't write them to her. Is she very angry? I didn't know it was wrong to post them in yon box, until Chris said so. And I only went a wee bittie into her garden. She will not prosecute me, will she?"

Sylvia looked surprised.

"*Prosecute* you, Marie? Why in the world should she do that? She loves your letters. And she's very grateful to you for taking care of her baby's grave, and she would like to thank you for it. She can't guess how you came to know she was living here, because she didn't think your father knew she still had a house in Ledbrooke, though they used to be great friends years ago."

Relief and amazement shone in Marie's eyes.

"Is Mrs. Blair the tall lady in black who was at the gym comp.?" she asked. "The one sitting by you, with all my letters?"

Sylvia nodded.

"She saw me redding up the wee grave," said Marie. "But I thought she was angry with me, and I ran away."

"So she said. But she wasn't angry, Marie; she was very grateful."

"And does she stay in the House with Shut Eyes?"

"Is that what you call it? The house with the blinds drawn down, and the green letter-box? That's hers."

"*Ma certes*," said Marie, with the elfin gleam that Sylvia had seen only once or twice before passing over her face. "It's an awfu' strange coincidence."

"Marie," said Sylvia, "don't you know Mrs. Blair? Don't you know that her little baby died two years ago, and she was dreadfully sad about it? And that her husband—my cousin, by the way—was killed in France? And that she and your father were friends? Didn't you mean those letters for her?"

Marie shook her head.

"But you wrote them to Jacintha," persisted Sylvia. "And Mrs. Blair's name is Jacintha. It's such a queer name. She had a queer old father, who loved the book of Revelations, and he called his daughters Crystal, Onyx, and Jacintha."

"It is a mairey he didn't get naming one of them after the sardine stone," said Marie, greatly interested.

"But *your* Jacintha?" questioned Sylvia.

"Och, she was just pretend," confessed Marie shyly. "I have written letters to her this long long while. In Glasgow I used to post them in a big empty house at the corner of Belmont Street—and in this place I saw the House with Shut Eyes. . . . I wouldn't have called a grown-up lady by her first name, would I?"

"I wonder where you got hold of the name," said Sylvia, easily accepting the "just pretend."

Marie screwed up her forehead.

"It was written under a painting," she said at last, speaking very slowly, as if she were trying to remember clearly, "a bonnie wee painting of a lady in Father's room, with fair hair, and a pale purple dress, and wild hyacinths in her arms, a bundle of them. But Father hasn't got a special room now. Aunt Matilda flitted when he went to France, and we took a smaller flat."

Sylvia seemed very interested.

"Why, Marie," she said, "that will be a portrait of Mrs. Blair. Of course it would be called Jacintha, and I am sure your father hasn't known two Jacinthas in his life. Mrs. Blair said she thought you were a Macleod when she saw you first, and that's why she asked your name."

"Likely I'd be wearing my tartan skirt," suggested Marie, interested too, and, by this time, quite unafraid.

"You'd also be wearing your Macleod face, which would mean quite as much to her," said Sylvia. "But, Marie, you mustn't mind because she has read your letters. You see, she thought they must be for her, though the 'Honourable' and the 'MacBain' worried her a little."

"Och, she'll think I'm daft," said Marie, shy again.

"She won't think any such thing," said Sylvia firmly. "Marie, it's wonderful to think that your pretend Jacintha should have come to life, isn't it?"

Marie considered. Mrs. Blair was no more her pretend Jacintha than Judith, with the new head Sylvia had suggested, would have been Judith.

"She hasn't *really* come to life," she said, her native accuracy making it necessary that she should explain to Sylvia. "She was different—she was a pretend person, you see."

"Yes. But Mrs. Blair is a dear, Marie. She'll like you, and be a good friend to you. And did you take care of the grave just because it was wee?"

Marie nodded.

"I was afraid when I got to Ledbrooke," she confessed, "and I ran away, and hid in the burying-place when I heard Chris and Marjorie coming. And yon wee grave was kenspeckle, because it was so wee, and I minded it afterwards, and took care of it."

"I'll be late for prayers," said Sylvia, in sudden alarm. And she got up to go.

"Sylvia," said Marie hesitatingly. . . . "Sylvia, don't tell the others about the letters to Jacintha——"

"Of course not," said Sylvia. "They belong to you, and to the pretend Jacintha. And only Mrs. Blair and I know about them."

With that Marie was contented. The four hours of morning school flowed past easily and happily for her, though she was alone, except for the occasional "looking in" of Matron. It was wonderful to think that she now had nothing to be afraid of—that she would not be prosecuted, that Mrs. Blair was not angry with her, and still more wonderful to know that Diana was coming to see her that afternoon, and that Sylvia had been. She thought much of Sylvia—it was so easy to tell her things. She always knew at once, and never laughed, never

seemed surprised. She had understood about the letters to Jacintha as quickly as about the stockings. Marie realized that, however friendly she came to be with Diana and the Green Dorm, she would not like them to know about these things.

Directly after dinner Diana and Kitty appeared, charged with excitement.

"Now, don't forget," said Diana, restraining Kitty. "It's *my* stunt. I'm going to tell her. Marie, we have both won the gym medal, you and me, equal first. Isn't it topping?"

"You and I, you mean," grumbled Kitty, who had been suffering from Miss Lester in an English lesson that morning.

"Och, away, I haven't won a medal!" said Marie, with shining eyes.

"You have. We are each having one—isn't it splendiferous? Two medals for the Green Dorm!"

"That's twenty marks for the Dorm shield and twenty for the Form shield," exulted Kitty. "I shouldn't be surprised if we won them both."

"I'm glad you have it," said Marie to Diana.

"And I'm glad *you* have!" said Diana to Marie.

They both laughed.

"I brought up your books in case you want to revise," explained Diana, producing Marie's satchel. "And here's the history revision list we got this morning. I copied it into your notebook. We'll do the stuff together, shall we? It's heaps easier. I'll come up after hockey."

"Oh, let me play too," entreated Kitty. "I might pick up something through hearing you two at it."

"Och, yes!" said Marie, with a pleading look at Diana.

"Right-o!" decided Diana.

And so the revision became a general thing that week—Diana and Marie, quick of wit and tenacious of memory, glancing for a moment at a printed page, and putting searching questions to one another in the manner they thought peculiar to Miss Dangerfield, or Miss Hornsby, or Miss Lester, or Mademoiselle, while Kitty desperately floundered and stumbled among the facts and theories with which, as it seemed to her, they juggled with such surprising ease, endeavouring to glue some piece of knowledge into her brain, only to find it had come unstuck by the next day. Diana never attempted to reason with her friend,

but let her go her own way, while she, with her own bright directness, forged ahead, but Marie, who had found it really difficult to learn to spell, had sympathy, and tried to make her understand.

"Och, don't be bothered with that!" she would say, as Kitty, with the unerring instinct of her kind, fastened on some irrelevant or unimportant detail and endeavoured to wedge it into her unwilling memory. "You'll not be needing that at your stage."

"It might come in useful," Kitty would answer hopefully. "Things that give me the sort of feeling that that does when I read it are generally what is wanted." And she would persevere.

Marie always remembered those evenings, and she remembered Sylvia coming to say good-bye before she went in for her county scholarship examination, and she particularly remembered Mrs. Blair's first visit.

The tall lady said nothing about the baby's grave, nor did she ask questions about Jacintha's letters. She brought an armful of books—fairy tales, because she guessed Marie would cling to them after her contemporaries disdained them, and school stories, and odd gaily illustrated nonsense

rhymes. And she brought a big bunch of violets, purple and white, and a bag of chocolate and sugar mice.

Marie laughed at the mice, and told Mrs. Blair about Kitty, who thought there was nothing so lovely to suck as a sugar mouse, "first, the pointed bit at the front, and then the round bit at the back, and then the piece of string that's his tail—it tastes nice for longer than you'd think."

And they looked at the books together, and Mrs. Blair told Marie about the ones she used to like when she was at school. Incidentally Mrs. Blair asked Marie a great deal about home—about Glasgow, and Aunt Matilda, and the flat, and Jenny, and, last of all, about her father.

"He has only had leave once," said Marie. "That was before I came to school in England. Do you think he'll come to see me here when he comes home again?"

"If his leave is in term-time, of course he will," said Mrs. Blair.

"But I mayn't go to Glasgow these holidays," said Marie. "Aunt Matilda is away at her sister's in Aberdeen. Perhaps she won't be back to Glasgow herself, and then I'll need to stay at school."

"No, no, you mustn't stay at school,

wee Marie Macleod," said Mrs. Blair, lingering on the name so that her voice was as kind as a caress. "You must stay with me at the 'House with Shut Eyes.' Only—you must think of another name for it. Quite a different sort of name, Marie. It has opened its eyes now."

CHAPTER XV

A REALLY HAPPY ENDING

IT was the sunniest, floweriest July that Ledbrooke had known for some years, and the garden of the High School, as always in summer, was one of the pleasantest places in the little town. Perhaps that explained the gaiety and good temper of the crowd that assembled under the lime trees on the stretch of turf that lay between the rose bushes, to see the Countess of Weldham give away prizes to the distinguished or lucky among the white-frocked girls—or rather, to see their own special Phyllis or Betty or Peggy take her prize from the Countess of Weldham, who, they hoped, would not make too long a speech on such a hot afternoon.

Not that the heat mattered in this shady, rose-scented garden. There would be tea after the ceremony, on the front lawn, and the holiday mood had already come far enough to make it possible to listen, without outward and visible signs of rebellion, to the

Reverend Mr. Prenderby Stowe, Chairman of the Education Committee for South Weldhamshire, expressing his admiration for Miss Dangerfield in rounded periods, which surprised the Lower Third, and to the Honourable Neville Mortimer, who, at Eton with another distinguished member of the aforesaid committee, yearly recounted the beginning of an episode of their schooldays, to which, like a recurring decimal, there was apparently no end, though the prefects, some of whom had heard the story six or seven times, said that there were signs that the climax approached, and that the First might live to hear it.

But a holiday mood was not necessary to keep the audience happy when the prizes were given away, and virtue and brain and muscle suitably rewarded. The Fifth certainly looked as if they deserved their blazoned Form shield—the Sixth did not enter for these things—but it was wonderful that the House (known in school as the "Dorm") shield, given to the girls who held the best record for good conduct, progress in their studies, and athletic achievement, should go to so lively a set as that which stood while a bright-haired, long-legged child ran up the platform steps as if she liked doing it, and

took the trophy from the Countess with a gay little smile.

"Live wires, those," remarked a sunburnt father, who, like most of the fathers and brothers who had managed to attend this feminine function, wore officer's uniform —only his was that of a kilted regiment. "Wonder how they managed to keep all the rules for a year."

"They probably didn't," whispered the tall lady in black who sat next to him. "But I understand lots of things count beside rules. . . . Do you think we may stand? We shall see Marie far better when she goes up for her prizes."

As they had chosen to occupy a back seat for this very purpose, he decided that they might, and they controlled their impatience till the Lower Third list of honours was read. It was a noticeable list, because two small girls had almost cleared the board. "Form prize divided," read her ladyship: "Diana Belvoir Kyrle, Marie Stewart Macleod. English prize: Diana Kyrle. French prize: Diana Kyrle. Mathematics prize: Marie Macleod. Drawing prize: Marie Macleod."

There was a flattering buzz of anticipation as the two ascended the platform.

Diana, who came first, had already been admired, and was admired again. The little girl with the nut-brown hair had not her gay confidence, and shrank a little from the noise of applause, but there was something so appealing in the shy gesture with which she took her prizes, whispering her thanks, and she seemed such a baby to have won three fat books, that the audience gave her a special clap as she descended the steps—a compliment which surprised her so much that she stopped short for a moment and looked up in something like dismay.

When, after presenting Lilian Somerton with a science prize, the Countess announced that the junior gymnastic medal was shared by Diana Kyrle and Marie Macleod, the audience laughed while it applauded. Diana knew why, and was not at all disconcerted, but Marie was terribly afraid that her stocking was coming down, and was thankful when, safely back in her place at the end of a bench, she could wait for the most interesting event of the prize-giving to her—Sylvia Leigh's triumphs.

The audience seemed properly impressed with this same Sylvia Leigh, who, head of the school, had won a county major scholarship, which, as she had also been awarded

an open scholarship for classics at Cambridge University, she had handed on to her runner-up, the star of Wilmshurst, Ledbrooke's rival high school. There was great rejoicing over this, and the sight of Sylvia crossing the platform for her medal as dux of the school, and various prizes for single subjects, evoked a big round of applause, for it was good to see her graceful head, her clear eyes, and her straight young figure.

No one was so vigorous in appreciation, however, as one small girl with a long pig-tail, who stood up, in her excitement, letting her own prizes tumbled to the floor as she clapped and clapped, smiling with delight, and receiving one quick little smile as the head girl passed to her place.

Drinking tea afterwards, everyone said it had been a charming afternoon. Relations and parents talked as they do on these occasions. Diana was distressed by the demeanour of her mother with Miss Dangerfield, and sought shelter behind a clump of rhododendron bushes, where Becky, who had been saving up through the long speeches for this moment, was giving a faithful rendering of the Reverend Prenderby Stowe's first speech, to the joy of the Green Dorm.

They were all there—Nancy White, who,

at first to her chagrin and then to her joy, was moved in when Maude Semple left at the beginning of the summer term, Marie, Lyn, and Kitty. Kitty had possession of the shield. A few moments ago she had proudly showed it to her mother, with a "Look what we have won!" "Clever darling!" was the answer, and Kitty prophesied a five-shilling tip for her prowess.

"Your father looks splendid, Marie," said Diana, and Marie, who had not realized till this moment that her father *was* splendid —who, in fact, had been a little nervous as to what impression his kilt might produce on Ledbrooke High School—put her arm round Diana's waist.

"I have told him about you, Diana," she said. "So has Mrs. Jacintha. Do come and see him."

So Diana was led up to Captain Macleod, who was talking to Sylvia and Diana's mother, while Mrs. Blair stood sipping her tea and looking so happy and interested that it was difficult to believe her to be the lady with sad eyes who passed Marie in Meadow Lane nearly a year ago.

"So your leave is up to-morrow?" said Mrs. Kyrle, who, though her hair was streaked with white, was recognizable by her

blue eyes and gallant bearing as the mother of Diana. "And Marie won't spend any of the holidays with you?"

"Fortunes of war," said Marie's father. "Yes, I am off to-night. But I leave my wee girl in good hands."

"We are going up north for a bittie," said Mrs. Blair, her arm round Marie's shoulders.

"Delightful!" said Mrs. Kyrle, who had spent a summer in Skye, and knew what she was talking about. "And you'll spare Marie to us for a fortnight afterwards, won't you? Diana has been counting on it for so long. I am sure it is right for these great minds to consort together."

Mrs. Blair thought so too, and Marie and Diana exchanged a quick glance of pleasure. *That* was all right.

Marie thought of the glories of the coming summer a couple of hours later, as she sat at dinner with her father and Mrs. Blair, in the room in the "House with Shut Eyes" which opened on to the lawn. But, as Mrs. Blair had said, it was now a "House with Open Eyes."

The French windows stood wide open, and the smell of flowers came in from the garden,

where the green turf was smooth and thick, and the roses, pink and white and deep crimson, bloomed in great masses beyond the place where the little stone nymph leaned to look at a silver ribbon of clear water that trickled from her pitcher into the bowl of the fountain. From the twisted branches of an apple tree a blackbird whistled every now and then the same three or four notes—and he was so pleased with them that no wonder he did them over and over again. On the path played a rough-haired sooty kitten—Marie's kitten, acquired for her by Mrs. Blair a few weeks ago, and immediately named Little Amen, because, as his mistress explained, he looked exactly like it.

"I *will* be enjoying myself these holidays," she said, with a little sigh of happiness.

"Without your nearest relative, you cruel lassie!" commented her father.

"You'll come home again in September," said Marie, with her quick little look of love for him.

"And where is home?" he asked.

"Here!" said Marie. And then, suddenly afraid lest she had been greedy for too much, she glanced at Mrs. Blair, her Mrs. Jacintha, as she called her, who had

given her a little sunny room for her own, and who had arranged with Miss Dangerfield that she should come to tea every Sunday last term. Suddenly she thought her sad lady as pretty as Sylvia, with the light on her fair hair and the gay, tender look in her grey eyes.

Marie's father also looked at Mrs. Blair.

"Is that right, Jacintha?" he asked.

Her eyes met his, still with the look Marie liked.

"Of course it is," she said.

It was nearly midnight, and Marie's father had said good-bye and gone, and Marie was asleep under the gay chintz cover of her little bed, but "Mrs. Jacintha" still sat by the window of the room which she had furnished last holidays for "Douglas Macleod's wee girl." There was a great deal for her to think about.

It seemed a long time ago since she and Douglas Macleod, and Ian Blair, and his relations the Leighs, had been tremendously friendly—a little clan from their own country in this quiet English town, whose scope for young men was in its engineering works, which seemed to have escaped there from the

big midland industrial district. Her friends and her enemies had agreed in saying that she treated Douglas Macleod very badly then —and later, when, his pride stung, he married fragile, little, dreamy Myra Burnett, who, everyone knew, adored him, she agreed with them.

The Macleods had left Ledbrooke for Glasgow, and he had written not a word to his old friends—it was not until eight years afterwards, when she had married Ian Blair, that she had heard from a casual acquaintance that Myra Macleod had died a few months after the birth of Marie. . . . Well, they had both been through the mill, Douglas and she.

And now he wanted her again.

She crossed from her place by the window and looked down at Marie, lying asleep. How easily she might have missed this child, who wanted her too! It was like Douglas to have decreed that Marie should be educated at Ledbrooke—it was like him not to have written to discover if any of his old friends still lived there, and to ask if they would help her through those first difficult weeks. Strange how Marie, not knowing whom she sought in her loneliness, should have found the owner of the name she had borrowed for

her invisible friend—if it had not been for the existence of that shadowy Jacintha and the necessity of posting letters to her, Mrs. Blair felt that she would not have known and cared for Douglas's child as she did—though it was Douglas's child who had tended the grave of hers. Her eyes were dim as she turned from the little bed.

"I couldn't care more for the wee girl if she were really my own," she thought. "And she soon will be."

Noiselessly she moved about the room, choosing from the big shabby trunk Marie had brought from school the things she would need for her visit to Scotland, and laying them in a brand-new suitcase, with the initials "M. S. McL." painted upon its glossy side. Nearly at the bottom of the trunk she found a sheet of paper, on which was written in the big round hand she knew so well:

"Addresses of friends I am writing letters to—

1. Sylvia Leigh,
The Manor House,
Clavering,
Near Ledbrooke.

2. Diana Kyrle,
Two Oaks,
Richmond.
3. Kitty Keyes,
The Rectory,
Ardencote."

Written underneath was:

"And I will send p.p.c.'s to Becky, Lyn, and Nancy, but they will send them to me first."

At the very bottom of the old trunk was a headless doll, arrayed in blue. She remembered at once—Judith, Judith who was dead. And there was also an odd bundle—some soft object, rolled in a night-gown. This must be Brownie.

She shook him out of the enveloping garment, surveying his comical painted face, his big ears, and the rabbits worked on his chest. . . . "Judith is dead, as you know, and I do not play with Brownie now. I do not think I wish Judith and Brownie, I only wish not to be lonely."

Quietly she shut the trunk and the suitcase, and, tiptoe, passed from the room, after one more glance at the quiet little figure that dreamed of Sylvia, and Diana,

and Kitty, and, perhaps, of her. In her own room she unlocked a polished oak chest in which lay a heap of tiny garments and a bundle of stained letters, tied with a rose-coloured ribbon. By the side of these she put Judith, but for a moment she held Brownie in front of her, looking into his funny face.

"Poor old thing!" she whispered. "Marie has grown up, and is a real schoolgirl now. But you mustn't mind."

Then she gave him a soft kiss on one flat ear, and locked him up in the box.

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